

ISHMAEL

ISHMAEL

A Nobel

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes

VOL. II.



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I S H M A E L.



CHAPTER I.

‘AS A ROE FROM THE HAND OF THE HUNTER.’

EIGHTEEN FIFTY-ONE was dead and gone, its bloody close a thing of the past—an old song—forgotten by almost everybody except a few hundred prisoners waiting their doom at the Fort of Bicêtre, or languishing in the Prince’s own old prison of Ham, or voyaging over tempestuous seas on their way to Cayenne. The world of Paris troubled its linnet’s head but little about that obscure minority in durance or exile. The new year began with pomp and splendour, flourish of trumpets, roll of organs, clank of helmet and sword, a grand *Te Deum* at the cathedral of Nôtre Dame. The great bell, whose monster clapper sounds but on occasions of grandest import, pealed

with deep and solemn voice over the house-tops of the *Cité*; and in that mighty fane, gorgeous with velvet and brocade, gold and jewels, resplendent with myriad tapers, lamp-lit altars, Paris thronged to see the Dictator enthroned upon a daïs, while the hierarchy of France invoked Heaven's blessing upon his lofty mission as elected ruler of the French people, the chosen of seven millions and a half of voters.

Once more the Imperial Eagle, symbol of Roman prowess, Roman pride, spread his broad pinion over Paris. The Republican catchwords, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, were effaced from the public buildings, and the Prince-President left the Elysée to take up his residence at the Tuileries. One of his earliest uses of despotic power was to confiscate the property of the Orleans Princes. This was the first flight of the eagle.

The new year was only a week old when an event happened which threw the whole scheme of Ishmael's life out of gear, one of those few events in a man's life which are fatal.

He had sat up late overnight studying a famous work on the construction of bridges, lent him by his master. The subject was full of mathematical difficulties, and as Ishmael was for

the most part a self-taught mathematician, having learnt only the elements of the science from good Father Bressant, he had found the treatise on bridges stiff work, and had toiled deep into the night without making any great progress.

His sense of being baffled by the difficulties of the subject so oppressed him, that when he lay down, in the hope of getting three or four hours’ rest before the working day began, he found himself unable to sleep for more than ten minutes at a stretch. His brain was fevered by the work he had been doing, and, over and above his vexation at non-success, he had a strange vague sense of trouble that weighed him down. Every now and then he turned restlessly on his hard pallet, or started up from his pillow, as if there had been a scorpion lurking under it.

He tried to reason with himself, to calm down nerves and brain. He told himself that the difficulties which had baffled him to-night would be subjugated by persistence and labour; and yet, and yet, the sense of worry, the feeling of oppression, were not to be overcome—grew stronger rather—as the darkness wore on towards dawn.

At last, in a moment of vexation, he gave up

the vain effort to sleep, and rose and dressed by candle-light. It was half-past five o'clock, and quite dark; but Ishmael thought that a walk countrywards, even in the darkness, would tranquilize his nerves, and make him fitter for the labour of the coming day. When he tried to open his door, he encountered an obstacle outside, which prevented the door from opening more than half-way. A very human groan, breathed in the darkness, told him that this obstacle was a human form.

‘Who is there?’ he asked, startled.

‘It is I—Pâquerette.’

‘Pâquerette!’

He went back, and relit his candle hastily, and then went out upon the landing.

Yes, it was Pâquerette. She was sitting on the floor, in the angle between the door and the wall, her head leaning against the plaster. Her face was deadly pale, and her forehead was daubed with blood.

‘Pâquerette, in Heaven’s name what has happened to you?’ asked Ishmael, putting down the candle hastily inside his room, and then stooping to lift up Pâquerette in his strong arms.

‘You are hurt! Who hurt you?—where?—why?’—

He gasped these questions breathlessly, while he carried her into his room and placed her in his arm-chair.

‘You are shivering,’ he said. ‘I’ll light my stove, and make you some coffee. But how did you come here, poor child? Tell me—tell me everything.’

‘I came late last night—after everyone was gone to bed.’

‘And you have been sitting there, on that cold landing, all night!’

‘Yes. It has seemed a very long time. But I did not want to disturb you; and I knew that you would come out in the morning, and that you would be kind to me. You were always so kind to me!’ she said, looking up at him with plaintive blue eyes, innocently, with unconscious love. ‘I have the basket that you gave me, and the flowers and berries I picked that day. The Charabia was angry about them once, and wanted me to burn them; but I would as soon have thrown myself into the fire. The basket is outside. Please pick it up for me, Monsieur Ishmael.’

He obeyed, full of wonder, full of pity. He brought the basket from the landing, and put it on the table beside Pâquerette, among his books and papers of last night. And then he knelt down and

lighted the stove, and filled the coffee-pot, which was all ready for his morning meal. He had acquired all the handy ways of a bachelor mechanic since his coming to Paris, and his preparations for breakfast were dexterously and rapidly made in the dim light of the single candle. He glanced at Pâquerette now and then, but he asked her no further questions. He could see that she was exhausted by some great agitation, by a night of cold and suffering; and he was content to wait until her strength should revive.

When the coffee was ready he coaxed her to take a cupful, waiting upon her, soothing her with womanly tenderness and patience. He felt as if she had been a wounded bird that had flown in at his window for shelter—a weakling that he could cherish and comfort in his bosom. He had no sense as yet of the incongruity of their position—no consciousness of the hand of Fate, albeit that ominous feeling of trouble, that vague oppression had been weighing him down all night.

At last, when she had taken the coffee, and the fire had warmed her, she began to talk, a little incoherently, childishly, even; but Ishmael was patient with her, and let her tell her pitiful story in her own way.

‘I daresay it was very wrong to come to you,’

she faltered; ‘I had no right, no claim; but you were always kind, and where else could I go? I dared not go to the Benoîts, for if they had hidden me ever so, grandmother would have found me in their apartment, and she would have ill-treated them for sheltering me. You are a strong man; she cannot beat you, or abuse you.’

‘You were quite right to come to me, if you were in trouble,’ said Ishmael, kindly.

He was kneeling by the stove, looking up at her as she talked, the candle light shining upon her blood-stained forehead and sorrowful eyes.

‘I hated him always, hated him from the very first. Did not I tell you that I hated him, that night when we were going home from Vincennes?’

The Charabia? Yes, I remember perfectly. That made me think it very strange you should be willing to marry him.’

‘I was not willing. I never left off hating him. When he touched my hand I felt as if I wanted to run away to the end of the earth. One evening he kissed me; and I was awake all night, shuddering at the loathsomeness of that kiss. But they told me I was to marry him, and that I was very lucky to have such an offer of marriage. It would be a blessing for all of us, grandfather said—for them and for me—for

the Charabia had saved a little fortune, and would make a home for us all. We were all to live with him in the rooms behind his shop; grandmother was to do the housework, and I was to live like a lady!’

‘And on this you thought better of him?’ speculated Ishmael.

‘No, no, no! I refused with all my might. I told them I would rather be lying in my grave than married to that hateful man; and then they scolded me, and told me what my mother had been; oh, is it not cruel to talk of the dead like that—the poor, helpless dead—who cannot rise up and answer? And grandfather told me that I must marry the Charabia. I had no choice; it was his wish, and I was bound by the law to obey him. He had brought me up, and clothed me, and fed me, and I was his property, to do what he liked with. It was his will that I should be the Charabia’s wife. Many and many a time he told me the same thing, and repeated the same cruel words. Sometimes, when he was out, my grandmother would be even more cruel, for she used to hit me and knock me about every time she was angry, and grandfather did not often beat me.’

‘Not often! Oh, poor child, poor child!’ sighed Ishmael.

‘When grandfather died there was hardly any money in the house; we were so poor that we should not have been able to live if it had not been for the Charabia. He gave grandmother some money for the *secrétaire* that grandfather had been working at before his death, and when that money was gone—and grandmother had taken the tool-basket to the Mont de Piété, and that money was gone—the Charabia gave her a little money to go on with. And then he said it was time we should be married, and then grandmother would have a home with us. They settled it all between them—we were to be married to-morrow. The banns were put at the church door, and the same day the Charabia brought me two new gowns and a shawl—a beautiful shawl.’

‘And that made you happy, Pâquerette?’

‘Happy! No, I was miserable, though grandmother kept saying how grateful I ought to be, and how the Charabia had sent me a *corbeille*, just as if I were a lady. I was miserable, and I was afraid, dreadfully afraid—afraid of grandmother, afraid of the Charabia. They both scolded me at every turn; and she used to pinch

me if she saw me crying when the Charabia was with us.'

Pâquerette turned up the loose sleeve of her old stuff gown, and showed a lean white arm, which had been mercilessly clawed by her harpy grandam, and which bore that lady's sign-manual in ever so many places, printed in purple.

'Last night, after the Charabia was gone, I told grandmother that I could not and would not marry him. It was no use talking to me—I would throw myself in the Seine rather than go to the Mairie with that man. She had been drinking—more than usual I think; and she flew at me, and pushed me against the wall, and held me there, and said she would stand over me till she had brought me to reason; she would beat out my brains rather than be conquered by me. I think I must have fainted with fright and pain: for I can remember nothing more till I woke from a kind of sleep, and found myself lying on the ground, and the room all dark, and I heard grandmother snoring in the inner room where she sleeps.'

'Poor little martyr!' said Ishmael, with infinite compassion.

'When I remembered what she had said, I made up my mind to go out quietly and throw

myself into the river. It was a very short walk to the quai de la Rapée, and in the darkness no one would see me jump into the water. I knew that if I stayed in that house grandmother would make me do what she wanted. What power had I to resist her? I went to the door and looked out. There were very few lights burning in the windows looking into the yard, and I knew it must be late. I was just going out when I remembered the basket you gave me; and I went back and took it from its place in my room. I meant to drown the basket as well as myself, so that the Charabia should not ill use it when I was dead. And then I went out and shut the door behind me; and nobody heard or noticed me. The yard door was not locked—it hardly ever is locked at night; for there are lodgers who come in at all hours.’

‘And you could think of drowning yourself! Oh, Pâquerette, how terrible!’

‘I meant to do it. Anything was better than to be made to marry that hateful man. The streets were very quiet when I went out—quiet, and cold, and dark—very cold; and the river seemed a long way off, for my head had bled a great deal, and I was very weak. When I got to the river-side the water looked cold, and black, and dreadful; and I was afraid to throw myself off the

quay. I stood ever so long looking down at that dark water, shivering, afraid. Once I shut my eyes, and took a step forward, trying to drop over the edge blindfold. But I could not do it. I was afraid of the water.'

'Afraid of death, you mean, poor child. Life is sweeter than we ever think, till we face that unknown country beyond.'

'I must be a coward,' said Pâquerette, 'for I could not kill myself. I had thought of you a good deal all the time—remembering how kind you were; wishing that you were near to help me; wondering if you would ever hear of my death; if you would be sorry. The basket I was carrying seemed a link between us somehow—it was something that your hand had touched: and then I thought I would go to you, and ask you to hide me, to save me from grandmother; and then I left the river, and found my way here. Twice I met a gendarme, who asked me where I was going, and I told him I lived at Ménilmontant, but I had been taking some work home to the faubourg Saint-Antoine, and had lost my way. So then the gendarme told me which way to come, and at last I found this street. I passed the house one day with Pauline Benoît, and she showed me your window. The door below was unlocked, and I opened

it softly and crept upstairs, and sat down in the corner by your door to wait for the morning.'

'What time was it when you came upstairs?'

'A clock struck two just before I got to your door.'

'And it was nearly six when I found you. Poor child! you had been sitting in the cold four dismal hours.'

The first glimmer of chill, gray light stole through the Venetian shutter as they were talking. It was seven o'clock, a dull rainy morning. That gleam of daylight seemed to awaken Ishmael to the realities of life. He began to consider how he was to dispose of this uninvited guest, this wounded bird which had flown to his nest for shelter. He got up from his knees and began to pace the room slowly to and fro, glancing every now and then at Pâquerette, who leant back in the capacious arm-chair, very white, very weary-looking, but refreshed by the coffee and comforted by the warmth of the stove.

What was he to do for her? How best protect her from her grandmother's wrath, from the pursuit of her hated lover? She could not remain under his roof. That was clear. Nor could she seek hospitality from the Benoît girls. There

could be no safe shelter for her in the rue de Sombreuil. Poor, helpless creature, what was he to do with her? Some safe haven must he find her, and at once. There was no time to be lost. That wretched old hag, her grandmother, might guess to what refuge she had flown, and might come in quest of her before the day was much older.

There was only one friend of whom he could think in his difficulty, and that was Lisette Moque, the *charcutier's* wife, otherwise Madame Ladronette.

‘I am going out to see a person who may be of use in giving you a home for a little while,’ he said presently. ‘Try to get some sleep while I am gone; and perhaps if you were to bathe your head in cold water it might do you good. There is some in that pitcher by the washstand. You can lock the door directly I am gone, and if anyone knocks do not answer.’

‘You don’t think grandmother will come and take me away,’ she said, with terror in her eyes.

‘She may come; but only keep your door locked till I return, and I will answer for it she shall not take you away.’

‘She has the law on her side—she said she has the right to do what she likes with me,’ faltered Paquerette.

‘She shall not touch a hair of your head. I will denounce her to the police as a murderess, if she come here after you. They shall see your wounded head, they shall hear your story. *Au revoir*, Pâquerette. Answer no one—keep quiet and snug till I come back.’

CHAPTER II.

CAN THE FLAG GROW WITHOUT WATER ?

IT was nearly nine o'clock when Ishmael went back to his lodging, and he was troubled at the idea of being late at the works at Belleville, where his presence was doubly needed now that he was a person in authority. He had found some little difficulty in persuading Madame Moque to take charge of Pâquerette; a young woman who had run away from her grandmother. That might be dangerous. As for the blood upon her face, that was nothing wonderful. A grandmother—and indeed that nearer relation, a mother—had often occasion to chastise a rebellious child. A little blood made a great show, but might really mean no more cruelty than a box on the ear; and where was the mother who had never boxed her daughter's ears?

Ishmael tried to explain that this was a case of real cruelty; that Pâquerette had narrowly escaped being murdered. And for the rest, Mère

Lemoine had no legal authority over this poor waif, whose name and whose parentage were involved in mystery.

‘That makes no difference. If Mère Lemoine has brought the girl up, Mère Lemoine has a legal hold upon her,’ answered Monsieur Moque, tenderly trimming a pig’s head *aux truffes*. A good many things were *aux truffes* in Monsieur Moque’s shop, but the bodily form of the truffle was not often visible. That aristocratic tuber was represented by an all pervading flavour, which imparted a curious family likeness to all the comestibles sold in the establishment.

‘There is only one way for it,’ said Lisette. ‘The girl ought to go into a convent.’

Ishmael started at the suggestion. It seemed reasonable, kindly even ; and yet he was chilled and saddened at the thought of that young life entombed within the four walls of a convent.

‘Give her a shelter for a few days, while we consider what is best to be done with her,’ he pleaded. ‘She is a quiet, inoffensive creature ; and I will pay whatever you think right for her board. Her grandmother will never trace her to this house.’

Lisette declared that there was nothing would please her better than to oblige her dear Monsieur Ishmael. There was an alcove in the little

salon, in which Pâquerette could sleep. Lisette hoped that she had cleanly habits, and would not injure the furniture.

Ishmael was sure that she would be careful; and it was settled that she should be taken in for a week or so, to give time for the arrangement of her future.

‘She is very poorly clad,’ said Ishmael. ‘If you will spend two or three louis in buying her a decent gown, I will supply the money. I wish I could do more.’

‘It is a great deal for you to do,’ said Lisette. ‘Sixty francs will not go far; but I daresay I can spare a few things out of my own stock, and we will manage to make her a trousseau. If she is going into a convent she will not want much—not even underclothing with some orders. The Carmelites, for instance, wear nothing but woollen next the skin.’

Ishmael shuddered at this detail. Conventual life only presented itself to his mind as a living death. And all his clubs and societies, his pamphleteers and theorists, were virulent in their abuse of monks and nuns.

He hurried back to his lodging. Pâquerette unlocked the door as he came up the last flight of stairs.

I knew your footstep,' she said.

'You have learnt it very quickly,' he answered.

She had slept an hour, she told him, and was very much refreshed by that peaceful slumber in the warmth of the stove. She had washed, and had arranged her hair neatly, and had tidied the room, and swept the hearth; and Ishmael thought his bachelor-chamber was beautified somehow by the touch of womanly hands.

'You will have to stay here all day, Mademoiselle Pâquerette,' he said, becoming more ceremonious than he had been in the surprise and agitation of the morning; 'and I am afraid you will have a very poor dinner. I have brought you a little ham,' taking out a small white paper parcel from his pocket; 'and in this cupboard'—opening a door by the fire-place—'there are plates and knives, bread and butter, and a bottle of wine. You must try and make yourself comfortable here till the evening, when I can leave work; and then I will take you to a person who will give you a comfortable home—till you and your friends have decided how you are to manage your future life.'

'I have no friend — but you,' answered Pâquerette.

'You have the Benoîts.'

‘Yes, they were very good; but I dare not go to them now.’

‘No; but they may come to you, perhaps. I am sure they may be trusted.’

He had no leisure for talk; so, after a hasty adieu, he started for Belleville at a pace which reminded people of the giant and his seven-leagued boots.

It was after dark when he went back to his nest on the fourth story. Pâquerette had found the day passing long, longer even than her days in the rue Sombreuil. Unhappily this child of the people had no resources of an intellectual kind. She could read but little, and with extreme difficulty; and the whole world of books was for her an undiscovered country. She looked with absolute wonder at Ishmael’s small library, something over twenty volumes, neatly arranged on a shelf beside the alcove in which the narrow bedstead was screened by a brown and yellow cotton curtain. She had never seen so many books in her life before. She took one off the shelf and peeped into it, thinking there might be pictures, a childish story that she could spell out, something to amuse her; but there were only pages of close printing, tables of figures, awful diagrams, wheels, pumps, pistons—

images that appalled and bewildered her. She did not try a second, but went to the window and looked out, screening herself with the curtain, lest her grandmother's dreaded eyes should be gazing upward to that fourth story.

The street was a dull street, the neighbourhood half town, half country, with a stamp of poverty and desolation upon all things the eye looked upon. A drove of cattle were going by to the public slaughter-house. Yonder, white against the wintry gray, rose the populous city of the dead, the cemetery of Père Lachaise, the field of rest. Pâquerette soon grew tired of looking out of the window, and went back to the stove, where she sat on the floor in the warmth, as she had sat through many a winter afternoon in the rue Sombreuil, when her grandmother was out gossiping, and there was no one to upbraid her for her idleness—a poor little Cinderella, neglected, ignorant, hopeless, unfriended, forgotten.

She sat looking at the little patch of red light in the front of the stove and thinking: thinking and wondering, vaguely, disjointedly, like a child. How good he was to her, this tall, big, noble gentleman, whose image stood out in a kind of luminous atmosphere against the

dimmer background of the green sward at Vincennes, the leafy glades of Marly. He was associated with the two happy days of her joyless life—days so unlike all the rest of her existence that it seemed as if she had been lifted into another world for a little while, only to be dropped back into the abject misery of common earth afterwards. So interwoven was the thought of him with that transient bliss, that she almost fancied it was he who had made her happiness. To him she had flown in her trouble, as a bird flies to the hill where its nest is built. How good he had been to her! not angry with her for troubling him, as she had feared he might be. How kind his voice, his eyes, his gentle touch! If she could have had a little kennel outside his door, in that angle where she crouched last night, footsore and stiff, and aching in every limb—just a little hutch in which she could curl herself up of a night, and in the daytime be his servant, clean his room, cook for him, wait upon him—she could imagine no more blissful existence. But this was not to be. He was going to take her to someone else who would be kind to her. She was not grateful in advance for that kindness from strangers. She wanted *him* to be kind, no one else. Would he but treat her as kindly as

good men treat their dogs, she would be content. She would love him and be faithful to him as dogs are faithful. There was a young house-painter in the rue Sombreuil who had a long, lanky beast of the lurcher species which adored him, slept outside his door of a night, followed at his heels wherever he went, carried his stick or his hat. Pâquerette would have been to Ishmael as that dog, could she have chosen her destiny.

He came back soon after dusk, and asked kindly how she had managed to get through the day, whether she had had enough to eat, and if her head had left off aching. And then he opened a parcel, and gave her a little shawl which he had bought for her on his way home—a neat little checked shawl, such as young Frenchwomen of the working classes wear pinned across their shoulders. He had made this further outlay wishing her to look as respectable as might be when he presented her to Madame Moque; and the warm gray and scarlet shawl, neatly folded across the pretty shoulders, concealed the thread-bare gown, and was certainly an improvement.

Pâquerette was enraptured. The Charabia had, as it were, loaded her with gifts, and she had hardly thanked him. Last night she had

left all his finery—necklace and earrings, gowns, shawl—flung in a chaotic heap upon her wretched little bed. But she was overcome by this last kindness from Ishmael, just as she had been by his gift of the basket on Saint John's Day.

When they were leaving she stopped suddenly. 'My basket,' she exclaimed. 'Oh, please let me have my basket.'

He handed it to her, smiling, yet deeply touched by this earnestness of hers—touched to think that she had treasured those withered buds and berries, sprays of oak and beech, for half a year, and had remembered them last night, when she was face to face with the awful alternative of suicide.

They said very little as they walked at a brisk pace to the distant rue Franch-colline, where the charcutier's shop stood out with a certain smartness and dazzle from the general dulness of the street. It was in an old and crowded quarter, not far from the *abattoir* where were sacrificed those pigs which formed the basis of Monsieur Moque's stock-in-trade.

Madame Moque received Pâquerette with kindness leavened by condescension. She was curiously impressed by her appearance, which, despite her shabby gown, and clumsy boots, and

pinched, pale look of a creature reared in abject poverty, had a certain air of distinction, an elegant fragility, which the abigail's quick eye discounted at a glance.

'She would be absolutely pretty, or better than pretty, if she were well dressed,' thought Lisette; and she began to have ideas about the platform of the Palais de Cristal, and to speculate upon whether something might not be made by forming the girl for a public career.

'If she has but an ear, and a little sprig of a voice now,' thought Lisette.

In a French concert-room voice is ever a secondary consideration; and Lisette knew by her own personal experience what a very small organ can be made to satisfy a Parisian audience.

Moved by reflections of this business-like character, Madame Moque took the girl suddenly in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

'She shall be to me as a younger sister,' she said. 'Have no fear, Monsieur Ishmael. I shall find the way to make this poor child happy. And now go to your dinner, and give yourself no further care. Come and dine with us next Sunday, and you shall see what I have made of Mademoiselle Pâquerette.'

'Please do not call me Mademoiselle,' said the

girl, dazzled by the splendour of Madame Moque's salon, which was as new and as wonderful to her as would have been the most gorgeous reception room in the Elysée or the Tuileries. That gold and alabaster clock, actually ticking, those candelabra with candles in them, the flowered carpet upon a red brick floor, the stiff vivid-yellow damask, the new shiny mahogany. What matter that it was furniture of the very poorest, vulgarest type, the coarsest workmanship; the general effect was overpowering to an eye educated by the sombre tones, the dull squalor of the rue Sombreuil. And when, after Ishmael's departure, Madame Moque showed Pâquerette the little bed behind the yellow curtains which draped the alcove, a very narrow, and sooth to say, a very hard little bed, cramped and stony as the grave itself, the girl was completely overcome.

‘I am to sleep in this room!’ she exclaimed, open-eyed with wonder.

‘Yes; it is as a favour to Monsieur Ishmael. For no other consideration would I have put up a bed in this room, but when he asked it of me as a concession to an old friend—’

‘He is an old friend,’ murmured Pâquerette, and her eyes lighted up with keenest interest in the question. ‘You have known him very long?’

‘I have known him ever since he was a baby. I knew him as a child, as a boy.’

‘*Ciel!* And when he was little was he handsome as he is now—good as he is now?’

Lisette sighed, closed her eyelids very tight, with a look which meant unutterable things, and shook her head vehemently.

‘There are things which must not be spoken about,’ she said. ‘You must never question me about Monsieur Ishmael’s past history—never. You must accept his kindness, and be grateful. No more. You see him as a workman, labouring shoulder to shoulder with other workmen, in a blouse and linen trousers. That is well, since it is his choice so to live. You will think of him, and speak of him as Ishmael, the stonemason, and under no other character. That is his wish.’

‘If he were a king I could not honour him more than I do,’ said Pâquerette, with innocent frankness. ‘But I am glad he is only a workman. He would seem so far away if he were anything else.’

Again Madame Moque screwed up her eyelids, and extinguished her bright beady eyes, and shook her head significantly; but Pâquerette was too simple to understand this byplay.

Ishmael dined with the Moques next Sunday,

and found Pâquerette wonderfully smartened and improved in her appearance, by Lisette's care. If he could have found any fault, it was that she was a little too smart, too *apprêtée*—the artistic carelessness of her loosely piled-up tresses a shade too elaborate—the picturesque sailor-knot of her *ponceau* neck-ribbon a thought too intentional. But it was all Lisette's doing, and it was meant in kindness; so he suggested no fault in his protégée's *ensemble*. She wore a very old black silk gown of Lisette's, which had been subjected to every process of revivification known at that period of art; but, although the gown was in a manner at the death-rattle, it had been made to fit Pâquerette's slim figure so perfectly, and it was adjusted with such a superior style, that it looked almost elegant.

After the dinner, which was excellent, Madame Moque suggested a walk on the boulevards. The night was frosty and clear, the stars were brilliant, and the lamps at the cafés would be brighter still; or, at any rate, a nearer, more human brightness, that one could enjoy more. There was even a possibility of a theatre, Lisette thought, if she once got the two men out of doors; and of all earthly pleasures, Lisette adored the *paradis* of the Théâtre Français, where, if the acting were

sometimes above her head, the gowns and jewels always appealed to her finest feelings. There was no performance at the Palais de Cristal on the Sabbath, so she, who had on week nights to amuse other people, was free to seek amusement for herself.

‘If I do not see other talent occasionally, how do you suppose I am to create any original effects?’ she asked the charcutier sometimes, when he was reluctant to pay for a couple of seats at a theatre.

To-night Madame Moque had a secondary motive for wishing to be out of doors. She wanted a confidential talk with Ishmael, and no such conversation was possible in the yellow salon, twelve feet by fourteen, where every word anybody said must needs be overheard by everybody else.

So directly dinner was over they started for their evening walk, Madame Moque suggesting that they should take their coffee at the *café de la Rotonde* in the Palais Royal, which would be much gayer than taking it at home.

‘And ever so much dearer,’ said Monsieur Moque, who never took his eye off the goal which he had set before him at the beginning of his career, namely, a house at Asnières

and a snug little income from the funds. Even a couple of cups of coffee at a fashionable café, meant so many sous subtracted from the sum total of his future wealth—so many days pinched off the period in which he was to live at his ease in his suburban villa,

Lisette told her Alphonse to offer Pâquerette his arm, and to go on in front, while she took possession of Ishmael, and they two brought up the rear. In this wise she was sure of not being taken by surprise by Pâquerette creeping up behind and hearing herself the subject of conversation.

‘Well,’ she said, as soon as the others were out of earshot; ‘what do you think of her? Have I not begun to form her already?’

Ishmael did not want to be ungrateful, but he was too sincere to be capable of concealing his real sentiments.

‘Do not make her a coquette,’ he said.

‘Make her a coquette—I!’ cried Madame Moque, as if the suggestion of such a possibility were absolute foolishness. ‘Coquetry is not in my line, I assure you. A respectable married woman, with household cares, and a business, and a profession—there is very little leisure left in my life for coquetry. But I confess to taking some pains

with that poor benighted child, who had no more idea of doing her hair than a heathen. I thought you would like to see her looking nice.'

'So I do,' answered Ishmael; 'only I fancied she had somewhat of a coquettish air—a consciousness of being pretty, which I never noticed in her before.'

'She is *not* pretty,' said Lisette decisively; 'at best she is only interesting. And as for consciousness, if you suppose that she, or any woman living, is without vanity, you are less sensible than I thought you.'

'She looked charming in that gown of yours,' pursued Ishmael, with an apologetic air.

'She has actually *no* figure,' protested Lisette. 'I had to take that gown in ever so many inches.'

Ishmael could not help thinking that if this were so, the negative type of figure had merits in the way of grace and elegance which he had never observed in the positive.

'And now I want to go to the bottom of things, to have a serious talk with you,' began Lisette, in a graver tone. 'You know that I took care of you when you were a baby, and my feelings for you are purely maternal.'

'You were always very good to me,' answered Ishmael with a sigh, thinking how little he knew

of maternal affection, which in his case had meant no more than capricious kisses, occasional kindnesses, and habitual neglect.

‘Well, then you will believe that I am your friend in all I say. Now, I want to know what you mean to do with this girl—at once—before we go a step further. She is a very nice little thing—granted ; interesting, and with a certain child-like grace which might be developed into the real Parisian *chic*.’

‘Heaven forbid !’ cried Ishmael.

‘But what then ? First and foremost, do you mean to marry her ?’

Ishmael reddened to the roots of his hair, and then gradually paled again. First a hot feeling, and then a cold feeling : and the coldness meant a negative reply.

‘I have no such thought,’ he said. ‘It will be many years before I think of marriage ; and when—if I ever do marry, I should like my wife to be my superior—a woman of education, who could make me better than I am. I should like to be able to reverence my wife.’

‘Then Pâquerette is out of the question,’ replied Lisette, with evident satisfaction. ‘And now the question is, what are we to do with her ? To my mind there are only two ways in which she can be

provided for. The first, which I suggested the other day, is to put her into a convent; the second, which I have no doubt she would prefer, is to bring her out at the Palais de Cristal.'

'Bring her out—Pâquerette—as a concert singer!' cried Ishmael, thinking Lisette must have suddenly gone out of her wits.

'Why not? She has no voice, I grant you; but I have found out that she has an ear—an ear as fine and true as a skylark's. And *I* can make her sing. She could sing little *patois* songs, dressed as a peasant. She is no beauty; but in a Normandy cap, a pair of *sabots*, a red petticoat, and a little blue bodice, she would take Paris by storm. Her ignorance, her childishness would not matter a bit. That would all pass for *chic*, originality. Let me train her, and bring her out in my own way, and she shall astonish you before you are a year older. It shall cost you nothing. I will keep her, and teach her, and clothe her at my own expense; and I will ask no more for my pains than her salary for the first three years.'

'Let her appear in that place—before all those men—smoking, drinking, laughing, quarrelling—the very offal of the town,' said Ishmael.

'Your mother acted in that place, Monsieur,' replied Lisette, deeply offended.

His mother! yes. The thought was horrible. Still more horrible was it to remember that when his mother acted in that theatre she was already so deeply sunken in the mire that one degradation the more hardly counted. But Pâquerette, poor child of the gutter, was yet unsullied. And he shrank from the thought of placing her in such an atmosphere.

‘I myself have the honour to appear there nightly,’ continued Lisette, ‘*I* do not feel myself degraded by the applause of the people. I wonder that you, who wear a blouse and live by the labour of your hands, can speak so slightly of your brother-workmen.’

‘There are people and people,’ answered Ishmael. ‘I hope you do not take the class who drink and smoke, and blaspheme at the Palais de Cristal, as the type of the artisan, any more than you would those devils who used to smoke and drink at the wine-shops at the barriers in the year ’32, watching the hearses going to the cemetery, and calling out “Your good health, Monsieur Morbus,” as the dead went by. I have no clanship with such men as I saw at your concert-hall.’

Lisette, still offended, owned that the frequenters of the Palais were perhaps not of

the first class. They liked songs that were *un peu risquées*, speeches that were pronounced *avec intention*. But what then? One must laugh.

‘I should not like to hear them laugh at Pâquerette,’ answered Ishmael sternly. ‘I should feel inclined to pitch them head over heels into the street. No; I would ever so much rather she went into a convent, though that seems very dreary.’

‘It is dreary; she would pine to death in six months,’ said Lisette, who had set her heart upon bringing out Pâquerette, with an eye to profit. There was money to be made by a young, attractive *débutante*; and Lisette had put the girl through a few little experiments in the vocal and histrionic way, and had discovered that she would be very quick to learn anything, and indeed possessed the mimetic faculty in a marked degree.

‘One thing is certain,’ she said presently; ‘that poor child must not go back to the faubourg Saint Antoine to be beaten to death by her grandmother.’

‘No, she must not go back,’ answered Ishmael gravely; ‘she must go into a convent. I will make inquiries to-morrow.’

‘It will cost money,’ said Lisette.

‘I must find the money.’

They were on the boulevard by this time. They had pierced through narrow streets to the boulevard Montmartre, and were now descending into the full glory of the boulevard des Italiens, which was crowded with pedestrians, and gay with a cold and frosty brightness, the lamps below burning brighter, just as the stars burnt above, in the clear, keen air. Tortoni’s and all the fashionable cafés were crowded, warm with much people and much gas, glowing with light, sonorous with the buzz of voices and the chinking of glasses and tea-spoons.

‘I am dying for a cup of coffee,’ said Lisette. ‘Suppose we go to Laperle’s?’

Laperle’s was one of the smaller cafés, an old house, with the ground-floor rooms almost as low as an *entresol*—a snug little nest of three small rooms, opening into each other, with sanded floors, originally intended as a compliment to the English patrons of the establishment. Laperle’s was a favourite house with the artistic classes, the Bohemians, the *Râtés*, and was always full. The ranks of failure are never thinned—every day brings recruits to *that* regiment.

Lisette pushed her way to the one vacant table, in a snug little corner near the stove, and the other three followed her. The whole place was like an oven, the atmosphere a mist of light, and dust, and heat, and tobacco smoke, flavoured with cognac.

‘How delicious after the cold outside!’ said Lisette, with a retrospective shiver.

‘*Boum,*’ cried a waiter, in response to the charcutier’s summons; and Lisette, who was more at home than her husband in the cafés of Paris, ordered four *demi-tasses*, with accompaniment of cognac understood.

The room was crowded. They had only just space enough to slip into their seats at the little table. Pâquerette, as the smallest of the four, screwed herself into the angle of the wall, where she sat looking at the company and the lights with wide-open eyes. It was not by any means a splendid place of entertainment, but it was curiously different from ‘The Faithful Pig,’ or the little wine shop in the Rue de la Roquette, to which she had gone upon occasions in quest of her grandfather. There was here a life and brightness, a flavour of elegance, gaiety without drunkenness, coats instead of blouses, tobacco of a different odour, all things that were new to Pâquerette.

While she was gazing, interested, amused, as in a kind of fairyland, her eyes suddenly encountered another pair of eyes, which fixed her own by the intentness of their gaze.

The eyes belonged to a young man, elegantly but carelessly dressed, with coat wide open over a velvet waistcoat, Byronic collar, necktie loosely fastened, as if it were midsummer.

He was leaning with his elbow on a table, talking to a burly, dark-visaged man who looked like a painter. He had been declaiming vehemently to his friend a minute ago, but now he was silent, absorbed in his contemplation of Pâquerette.

He was fair and pale, slender, fragile-looking: the very opposite of Ishmael, with his dark strongly-marked brows, black eyes, broad shoulders, six feet. Pâquerette looked at the stranger curiously, wondering that there should be people so different.

Ishmael sat with his back to the room, facing Pâquerette.

He saw that sudden wondering look of hers.

‘Do you see anyone you know here?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she said, blushing at the question.

‘But you were looking as if you recognised some one,’ he said.

He turned involuntarily as he spoke, and surveyed the crowded room.

The young man who had been looking at Pâquerette rose hastily, came over to Ishmael, and gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder.

It was Hector de Valnois, Ishmael's friend of the fourth of December.

'Why have you forgotten your promise and never been to see me?' he asked.

'Not because I am ungrateful, but because I did not want to trouble you too soon,' answered Ishmael, grasping Valnois' proffered hand, such a small womanish hand in the stonemason's broadened palm.

'You would not have troubled me. Well, I am glad I have met you, if only by accident. Do you often come here?'

'I was never here till to-night.'

'So! I thought if you had been a *habitué* I must have met you before now.'

CHAPTER III.

‘A MAN’S HEART DEVISETH HIS WAY.’

ISHMAEL introduced his friends to Monsieur de Valnois, who made himself at once at home with Madame Moque, and would fain have been as easy with the *charcutier*, but that respectable citizen had a shyness in the presence of the artistic classes, the outward sign of which was a kind of sullen ferocity not over pleasant to strangers.

‘Your friend is red, I take it,’ whispered Hector to Ishmael; ‘vermillion among the reds.’

‘On the contrary, he is a staunch Bonapartist, and sighs for a second empire.’

‘Then be assured he will be gratified; the empire is at hand. The very air we breathe is full of signs and tokens of an approaching despotism; a friendly despotism, a paternal despotism, a despotism encouraging to trade, favourable to the development of art, the foster-mother of genius, mark you: but a despotism all the

same. We have a Press that is bound hand and foot, a Senate that is packed with zealots for one cause—a Police of unparalleled strength and acuteness. In a word, we are on the eve of a second empire, more brilliant, more splendid, more costly, more luxurious than the first—as gaslight is to candlelight, as aqua-fortis to cognac.’

‘Enterprise has prospered and good work has been done for the world by despots before now,’ said Ishmael, remembering what his employer had told him about the building trade.

‘My friend, all great works have been done under tyrants, from the Pyramids to the Escorial,’ answered Hector. ‘Show me any great work that has ever been achieved by republicans. *Their* mission is not to do, but to undo.’

‘In America——,’ suggested Ishmael.

‘Oh, don’t talk of a handful of savages *là bas*; creatures in wampum and feathers.’

‘The Republic of Venice——,’

‘A tyranny divided by ten, a despotism upon ten feet. But it is a solecism to talk politics in the presence of ladies; and Mademoiselle has a frightened look, as if our big words had scared her. Is she your sister?’

‘No.’

‘Ah, I forgot. You are alone in Paris.’

‘Quite alone. Madame Moque is an old friend ; and Mademoiselle is a guest of Madame Moque’s.’

‘I see ; and the starlit night tempted you all to the boulevard. There will be skating before long, if this frost continue. Do you skate, Mademoiselle ?’

Pâquerette blushed, and faltered a negative. She had seen the boys sliding and skating on the canal de l’Ourcq. She had even longed to join them, a year or two ago, when she was in the *gamine* stage of her existence. Beyond this much she hardly knew what skating meant.

‘It is a new emotion—a new rapture. You should make Monsieur Ishmael teach you ; or, failing that, let me be your instructor. Suppose we arrange a party for the Bois. If the wind do not change before Wednesday the lake will be frozen. What say you, Madame Moque, shall we arrange a party for Wednesday afternoon — a skating party ?’

‘Mademoiselle is going into a convent next week,’ interjected Ishmael curtly ; ‘she will have no time to learn skating.’

‘Going into a convent ! *C’est raide !* And you bring her to Laperle’s to prepare her for conventual life ! Does that count as a part of her noviciate ?’

Ishmael made no reply, and Hector went back

to his friend at the other little table, after a smile and a bow to the ladies of the party. But ten minutes later, when they were all leaving the café, Hector came up behind Ishmael on the boulevard, and slipped his hand through his arm. ‘I want five minutes’ talk with you, my friend,’ he said. ‘If you are walking towards the Porte St. Denis, so am I.’

‘I would as soon go that way as any other, if these ladies have no objection,’ answered Ishmael, looking at Lisette, who declared immediately that she had been on the point of proposing that they should walk up the boulevard, and go home by the rue St. Denis, even if it were ever so much longer than those narrow streets and short cuts by which Alphonse had brought them.

‘It is a delightful night, and we are out to enjoy ourselves,’ said Lisette, who was favourably impressed by this elegant young man in the loose steel gray overcoat, with a fur collar. A fur collar always appealed to Lisette’s feelings. It was suggestive of rank and fashion, of noble youth which runs through a fortune, and gives nice little suppers to actresses, at Véfour’s, or the Maison Dorée; to come to an untimely close afterwards, perhaps, on one of those marble couches in the Morgue.

So Ishmael and Hector walked up the boulevard

with Lisette between them, while Monsieur Moque still kept a few paces in the front, with Pâquerette upon his arm. The boulevard was a new experience to her; the lights, the people, all radiant under the brilliant winter sky, seemed to belong to another world. She had but one flaw in her delight, and that was the ever present fear of meeting her grandmother roaming about in quest of her; but she comforted herself with the thought that locomotion was not in Mère Lemoine's habits, and that it would be only by a superhuman effort she would get as far as this part of Paris.

'What an interesting, childlike face that is,' said Hector, with a motion of his head towards the girl in front of them. 'Why convent?'

'Because she is about the most friendless and desolate creature you can imagine,' replied Ishmael, 'and a convent is the only possible home for her.'

'I am friendless and desolate—very desolate when I have failed to get my last *vaudeville* accepted by one of the theatres,' said Hector lightly; 'but I don't go into a monastery.'

'You are a man, and can fight the battle of life.'

'So can a woman, and she is much better armed than we are. There is always a chance for a woman. There is always one fool in the world who will waste his love and his money upon her. If she is

ever so old and so ugly she has only to wait her time, and she will find herself somebody’s *béguin*—somebody’s mania. There are those who worship the poetry of ugliness. There are devotees who adore a squint, who see grace in dry bones, beauty in a splay foot. I assure you, Ishmael, there never was a Cleopatra living who could not find her Antony, ready to lose a world for her. And when Cleopatra has the languorous blue eyes, the poetical pallor of your young friend yonder, she is sure of success in life.’

‘What kind of success?’ asked Ishmael, in a low voice, that trembled ever so little with suppressed indignation. ‘There is a good fortune that leads to the gutter and the hospital—perhaps you mean that.’

‘Far from it, my friend. The gutter and the hospital are remote contingencies in every woman’s life: just as there are rocks and sandbanks that lie in wait for every ship that sails. Many a vessel gets safely to her haven; and why should not your little friend there be lucky?’

‘The only luck she could have would be to marry an honest man,’ answered Ishmael, bluntly; ‘and there are not many men who would care to marry a girl brought up in dire

ignorance and reared amidst squalor and drunkenness.'

'There are men who will sacrifice a few prejudices for the sake of a pretty face. I do not say that Mademoiselle yonder is absolutely beautiful; but there are some faces that are worse than beautiful. They do more mischief in the world than beauty pure and simple. But pray who is the young lady, and how do you come to be interested in her fate?'

Ishmael told Pâquerette's story as briefly as possible.

'And she fled to you for refuge, having no other friend; and to reward her faith you will hide her from all that is joyous and beautiful in life; entomb her within the four walls of a convent—where, as she is friendless and penniless, she can only enter as a lay sister—a drudge—a *femme de peine* without wages—condemned to wear coarse clothing, to eat coarsest fare, to sleep on a pallet, to rise before dawn, to pray continually, to obey blindly, to be silent when her young lips are eager to be talking, to be grave when her young heart would fain rejoice in laughter, to forego all human love, all human praise and admiration, for all the days of her life. That is how you would

recompense her for that innocent faith, that lovely childlike trust in your goodness and your bounty which brought her to your door, wounded, massacred almost—a creature most worthy of pity and of kindness. I cannot applaud your chivalry, Monsieur Ishmael.’

‘Believe me, I have no desire but to do what is best for Pâquerette,’ said Ishmael, considerably shaken by this passionate summing-up of plain facts.

‘I am entirely of Monsieur’s opinion,’ said Lisette, smiling and sparkling upon Hector with the bright black eyes and the white teeth which time could not wither. ‘I consider that it would be positively cruel, an act of tyranny, to shut that poor child up in a convent. She has had little enough pleasure in life—none that I can make out, except two solitary days in the country, when she met Monsieur Ishmael. And to bury her alive among a set of stern nuns, before she has tasted one of the pleasures of life. No; as you say, Monsieur, let her have her chance. Every woman has a right to her chance. There is always the convent, my faith, when one has had enough of the world; just as there is always the river when one has had too much of life. Let the poor little soul have her opportunities,

and she may make an artistic success. I pledge myself to put her on the high road to fortune, if Monsieur Ishmael will only let me have my own way.'

Upon this there followed a long argument about the Palais de Cristal, in which Lisette urged the wisdom of allowing Pâquerette to make her *début* at that place of entertainment as soon as she was able to sing three or four *patois* songs. Hector offered to write them for her, and to get them set to music by his friend the *répétiteur* at the Palais Royal. The thing was quite in his line; and they would produce songs which should take the town by storm.

Ishmael argued gravely against the whole scheme. Pâquerette was unsuited to such a life. The Palais de Cristal was a low place.

'What does that matter? Let her but make a hit with one of my songs and she will be engaged at a boulevard theatre in a trice.'

A boulevard theatre! Poor little Pâquerette! Ishmael had been to the boulevard theatres. He had seen a fairy spectacle in which songs and dances and crowds of lightly-clad sylphs were the distinguishing features. It was before the days of the *Biche au bois*, and the *pièce à femmes* had not yet reached its climax; but Ishmael had

seen enough to prejudice him against the stage of the boulevard; and he felt that he would rather see Pâquerette entombed in the gloom and silence of the severest conventual order, than exhibiting her fragile, flower-like prettiness side by side with the women he had seen across the foot-lights.

He was not a man to be talked out of his opinion even by his best friend, and though he respected Hector as a man who knew the world and knew Paris, he was not persuaded into approving the concert hall or the stage as a future for Pâquerette. But he was influenced, and deeply, by what Hector had said about convent life; and he told himself that in this the Parisian had spoken the words of truth and wisdom, and that he, Ishmael, had no right to sacrifice this girl's liberty to the convenience of the moment. She had flown to him for a refuge; and was he to give her a cage? She had come to him for bread; and could he give her a stone?

He remembered, with a thrill of tenderest pity, her happiness that spring afternoon at Vincennes, when they two had danced together on the green-sward; he recalled the picture of her enraptured face as she flitted from flower to flower in the wood at Marly; and, remembering

these things, was he to give her over to the gloom of an existence in which there should be no dancing, no summer holiday in woodland or park? Was he, who had no right over her except her own helplessness, her child-like trust in him, was he to be the harsh arbiter of her destiny, and to deliver her over to a death in life within stone walls?

In his inexperience he pictured a convent as infinite gloom—a place of everlasting penance, and prayer, and self-sacrifice, and surrender. He thought of something much worse than the reality, and he shuddered at the idea of his own hardness of heart.

‘You are right,’ he said presently; ‘she shall not go into a convent—that was a wild idea of mine. We must find a home for her somewhere, with some good woman who will teach her a trade. She will be satisfied with very little, and we will not barter her liberty against a crust.’

‘You had much better let Madame work out her own little scheme,’ said Hector lightly. ‘Here we are at the gate; here our ways part. Come and see me soon, Ishmael. To-morrow, if you will. Good-night, Madame. How about my suggestion of a party for the lake next Wednesday afternoon?’

Lisette declared that she would, of all things, love to see the skaters, should there really be ice on Wednesday ; but Alphonse reminded her that an excursion to the Bois would occupy the whole afternoon, and that as she had to go to the Palais de Cristal at seven in the evening, there would be no margin for rest, and the quality of her voice would inevitably suffer by fatigue, to say nothing of the chances of hoarseness from exposure to the cold. In a word, Monsieur Moque asserted his marital authority in the face of a too fascinating stranger ; for although he loved to talk of his wife’s conquests, and the golden youth who languished for a smile from those carmined lips, he was not exempt from the pangs of jealousy.

Lisette shrugged her shoulders and submitted.

‘ I am a slave to my profession,’ she said.

‘ I shall come and hear you sing to-morrow evening,’ said Hector, as they shook hands. ‘ I feel convinced beforehand that you are throwing away your talents in that *bouge* yonder, and that you ought to be at one of the boulevard theatres.’

On this they parted, Lisette entranced by the easy charm of a manner which realised all her dreams of golden youth. De Valnois had not left them a minute before she began to question Ishmael about him. She was a little dashed upon hearing that he

was only an author—an author at present hardly known to fame, and that he lived upon a second floor in the rue Montorgueil. She had expected to be told that he was a sprig of nobility, squandering a princely fortune upon diamonds, dinners, and suppers after the play. A journalist, a playwright—that was nothing very great; but he had charming manners all the same.

CHAPTER IV.

‘MARRED IN THE HAND OF THE POTTER.’

LISETTE MOQUE was a person not easily to be diverted from any scheme which she had devised for her own advantage and enrichment; and having taken it into her head that a good deal of money might be made out of so young and teachable a pupil as Pâquerette, she had already built up half a dozen castles in the air with no better basis than that golden possibility. Pâquerette was young, Pâquerette was interesting, Pâquerette possessed qualities of manner and person which, trained by an experienced mistress, might be made the quintessence of *chic*, originality, audacity; and so improved, and, as it were, crystallized, Pâquerette ought to take the town by storm, and make a fortune within the first three years of her professional career.

For a popularity so essentially transient as that of a *café-chantant* prima-donna those first three years would be the golden harvest-time. While

Pâquerette was fresh, and childlike, and fair, the town would run after her. A song, *tant soit peu risquée*, from those young lips, would have a piquancy to catch the jaded Parisian public, to set managers and speculators bidding against each other for the possession of the last novelty in *chanteuses de canaille*. It was aggravating beyond measure that Ishmael's provincial notions of propriety should stand in Lisette's way to putting money in her own purse, and, in a minor degree, enriching her *protégée*.

Bent on accomplishing her purpose Lisette held forth eloquently to Pâquerette upon the charms and chances of life behind the footlights, either in a *café chantant* or a theatre. She dwelt upon the sunny side of the *cabotine's* existence—the applause, the feasting, flowers, fine gowns, horses and carriages, and diamond necklaces, dropping as it were from the skies, so ethereal and free from earthly taint seemed their origin as described by Lisette.

Poor little Pâquerette sat there sewing, turning and patching up a winter petticoat which Madame Moque had given her, and felt as if she were wandering in some wonderful dreamland, a fairy region of bliss and light, and hothouse flowers, such flowers as Madame had shown her yesterday

afternoon at a shop in the rue Castiglione. And in such a wonderland she, Pâquerette, might dwell, if she would but follow Madame Moque's advice, and learn to sing. Her voice was a poor little pipe, Madame told her, but the teaching in such cases was more than half the battle, and Madame was prepared to make a perfect slave of herself, out of sheer goodness of heart, in making Pâquerette a singer.

There was a little old wheezy piano in Madame Moque's *salon*, and on this she strummed the accompaniment of a Palais Royal song, one of the silly successes of the hour—a little *patois* song, with a nonsense refrain and a little dance between the verses. Pâquerette after three or four rehearsals did the thing admirably. It was just as if it had been composed on purpose for her, Lisette said. The sweet, flute-like voice, the childishly timid enunciation, just touching the syllables in a coquettish staccato, the light girlish figure circling gracefully in three or four turns of a waltz, to the tira-lira-lira-la of the refrain, all were perfect in their way.

'Dressed as I could dress you for that song, you would be the prettiest *ingénue* in Paris,' cried Lisette enchanted.

She took Pâquerette to the Palais de Cristal

that evening, and let her sit in a shabby little room behind the platform, from which she could hear the singing. It had been the greenroom in days gone by, and reeked with the grease and tobacco smoke of a quarter of a century. The old baize-covered benches against the wall, the paper, the ceiling, all were black with the grime of generations of *cabotins*. The speculator who had renewed and glorified the front of the building had left dressing-rooms and green-room untouched. He had drawn a hard and fast line between the public and the artists. Expenditure on the comfort of the latter would have been foolishness.

Pâquerette sat in a corner near the half-open door, and listened to the songs, the laughter, the applause. She peeped from her retreat every now and then: she could see the lights, the artificial flowers, lace draperies, gilding, tawdry decorations, and across a dazzling row of lamps she saw the crowd of grinning faces, melting away into an atmosphere of dust and gaslight towards the end of the building. It was a very vulgar paradise, a cheap elysium, redolent of tobacco and vile coffee, with a taint of still viler brandy floating in the air; but the effect of the lights and music and the multitude of

faces upon Pâquerette was as dazzling as the splendour of the opera house in the rue le Peletier would have been upon a more educated mind. Never before had she seen any such haunt of pleasure. Lamplight, and music, and happy faces were an enthralling novelty.

While she sat listening, entranced, to the quartette from ‘Rigoletto’—bawled with delirious vehemence by the soprano and ranted vigorously by a very hoarse baritone, while tenor and contralto affected a coquettish lightness which touched the confines of low comedy—the swing-door of the greenroom was opened and a young man entered. Pâquerette, with her eyes rivetted on the platform, neither saw nor heard anything behind her, and she was startled by a languid voice murmuring in her ear:

‘Good evening, Mademoiselle Pâquerette.’

She turned and recognised Ishmael’s friend of the other night, the young man whose elegant manners had been so praised by Madame Moque. She only smiled shyly by way of answer, too much engrossed to speak.

‘You are listening to the quartette?’

‘Yes. Is it not beautiful?’

‘Beautiful as a steam-saw. That wretched baritone’s voice is a mixture of *trois-six* and river fog. And to hear such music so murdered! Have you never been to the opera?’

‘Never,’ said Pâquerette, with wondering eyes. She did not even know what the word meant.

‘Ah, you must go some night, and hear that quartette properly sung. It is from a new opera, produced last year at Venice.’

‘What is a quartette, and what does it mean?’

‘A quartette is a concerted piece sung by four voices; and this particular quartette means—*que diable*, it has a whole world of meanings—the plot of a novel. It means love, jealousy, revenge, murder, the concentrated passion of a lifetime. And to think that you should hear such music for the first time in such a hole as this!’

‘Is it a very bad place?’ asked Pâquerette, with a scared look.

‘It is a third-rate concert room; but it is much better than a convent,’ added Hector, as an after-thought.

‘Is a convent so very dreadful?’

‘It means imprisonment for life, without having enjoyed the privileges of a criminal beforehand. But your friend, Monsieur Ishmael, has promised that he will not shut you up in a convent.’

‘I am glad of that,’ said Pâquerette. ‘I would do anything he told me to do; but I would much rather not go into a convent.’

There had been a little interval after the quar-

tette, and now Lisette began her comic song, and shrugged her favourite shrugs, and smiled her mechanical smiles, and turned herself as upon a pivot to right and to left, challenging admiration and applause. Pâquerette did not, in her heart of hearts, admire this song of Lisette’s; but she thought that it must be pleasant to be so heartily applauded, to have all those faces grinning rapturously at one’s least word or look. Ignorant as Pâquerette was, she had an instinctive knowledge that popularity, the homage even of the lowest, is sweet.

Monsieur de Valnois walked home with Madame Moque and her charge, and Madame’s conversation during the whole of that walk consisted of praise of the brilliant life of a concert singer or an actress, and in deprecation of Ishmael’s folly in forbidding Pâquerette’s *début*.

‘I could launch her as no one else in Paris could launch her,’ said Lisette. ‘I can twist the director of the Palais round my little finger. He would do anything I asked.’

In her eagerness to secure Valnois’ advocacy of her plan, Lisette invited him to supper, and at midnight the last sprig of the de Valnois found himself supping merrily enough on *gras double à la Lyonnaise*, and *pieds de mouton à la Sainte*

Menehould, rinsed down with a rough *médoc*, over a pork butcher's shop. After supper he heard Pâquerette sing her little song, which she now performed with considerable *chic*, as to the manner born. Hector thought he had never seen anything daintier or more fascinating than that small pale face, with the delicately pencilled brows and large blue eyes, that slim, supple figure in the shabby black silk gown, the long swan throat rising ivory white above the low linen collar and cherry-coloured ribbon.

'You are right,' cried Hector; 'she would be the rage in less than a month. It would be cruelty to deprive her of her chances.'

Pâquerette heard, and her little linnet's head was bewildered with gratified vanity. If Lisette's praises had flattered her, how much more flattering was the praise of this young man, with his gracious presence, careless elegance of dress, and air which implied fashion, aristocracy—all those wonderful attributes of mankind which had been newly revealed to Pâquerette from the discourse of Madame Moque, who took it upon herself as a duty to explain the ways of civilisation, the charms and delights of Parisian existence, the habits of the boulevard and the Champs-Élysées, to this poor little waif of Saint-Antoine.

From that hour Pâquerette's simplicity was a thing of the past. She had tasted the fruit of the fatal tree. She pined to know more. She was continually asking questions about the ways and ideas and meanings of that life which breathed and throbbed in the heart of that new Paris of the noble and the rich, which was as strange to her as El Dorado to Raleigh. And Lisette, who would have talked to the chairs and tables—nay, did so talk in her solitary hours—rather than not talk at all, was delighted to bring forth her stores of wisdom; to relate her manifold experiences; to tell of spendthrifts and *roués* who had flashed upon Paris, the brief glory of the hour, to crawl away to their province broken and penniless a few years afterwards, to die amidst the ashes of the ancestors they had disgraced, the land they had robbed; of beauty, lax and venal, whose butterfly career had involved the ruin of many, had given pure delight to none; of financiers, born in the gutter, who had crept by the thorny paths of usury, and trick, and falsehood to the very pinnacle of fortune; of speculators enriched by the toil of the million.

Pâquerette loved to hear these stories, related with a vivacity and freshness of colour which conjured up vivid pictures in the girl's mind.

She loved to walk the streets of Paris with her mentor, to look up at the windows behind which golden youth had gambled away princely fortunes ; to see beautiful women passing in carriages, women whose histories she had been told. What a strange glittering life it seemed—all flash, and fever, and dazzle—after the dirt, and the squalor, and the all-pervading dreariness of the rue Sombreuil !

The days and weeks crept on, and although Ishmael was still resolutely opposed to the career of a concert singer for his *protégée*, he had not yet made up his mind what was to be done with her. It was easier for him to pay Lisette ten francs a week for the girl's board than to devise a way by which Pâquerette might learn to get her own living. She was learning something every day in the Moque *ménage*, he told himself. She was beginning to be handy with her needle ; she went to market with Lisette ; she helped to keep the house in order ; and she now and then served in the shop. She was cleverer, brisker in every way since she had left Saint Antoine. Ishmael saw her every Sunday, on which day he either joined Moque and his wife in some excursion, or accepted their hospitality for a dinner.

But all this time, in spite of Ishmael's aversion to the stage and the concert room, Lisette went

on with her training, and Pâquerette had a singing lesson nearly every day. She had a fine ear, and soon learnt to pick out melodies and extemporise accompaniments on the wheezy old cottage piano, and promised speedily to surpass her mistress both in playing and singing. And she longed to be standing on the platform, with all those faces in front of her, and to hear the chinking of glasses and teaspoons, and the thunder of applauding hands and feet.

Ishmael in the meantime was not a little troubled in mind about this new responsibility of his. He thought of Pâquerette at all times and seasons. He made inquiries in every likely quarter as to the occupations of women—artificial-flower-making, dress-making, tailoring, shoe-binding, bedding. All the answers he got seemed alike unsatisfactory. Every trade about which he inquired was declared to be the hardest, the worst, the most disreputable, the least remunerative. There was work for women, yes; but not work that would feed them, or clothe them, or house them decently. Very few could contrive to live honestly on their wretched wages. Starvation, degradation, dishonour. His informants rang the changes upon words of dreadful meaning; and Ishmael began to despair of saving Pâquerette from the stage or the convent.

CHAPTER V.

'SET ME AS A SEAL UPON THINE HEART.'

PAQUERETTE had been a dweller in the rue Franch-colline for nearly three months. It was springtime, and the flower-markets were gay with primroses, and daffodils, and tulips. The poor had their woodland blooms, while for the rich the season of Parma violets, and white camelias, and lilies of the valley, was in its glory. Paris was awakening from winter darkness to sunshine and blue skies; and already the gummy chestnut buds were glistening in the gardens of the Tuileries, the nursemaids and children were rejoicing in the advent of spring. It was mid-lent, and the beasts were fattening for the great slaughter of Good Friday, a day sacred everywhere, save in the *abattoirs* of Paris, where the brute creation is sacrificed in readiness for the Easter festival, and for that extra good cheer which follows the orthodox fast.

For nearly three months Pâquerette had dwelt

at peace in her new home. She had been decently fed, comfortably clad; she had endured neither blows nor cursing; and it seemed to her that she had lived a new life, and had become a new creature—an altogether complex machine in comparison with that Pâquerette of the faubourg, who had no care but to escape hard usage, no joy in the present, no hope in the future. The Pâquerette of to-day was full of dreams, and hopes, and vague expectancies, and dim ambitions. She had been flattered and fired by Lisette and Valnois. She had been taught to believe herself a genius in a small way—to believe that she had gifts which would bring her gold and fame, and enable her to drive her carriage in the Champs Elysées, like the beautiful women with the strange histories whom she so fervently admired.

She was pleased with her own voice, which gained strength, and clearness, and flexibility with every day of her life—pleased with her own fingers, which every day grew more familiar with the keys of the little old piano, until they seemed to have an instinctive power of touching the right notes, and to fall as easily into the melody as the song of a bird. She was pleased with her existence and its variety—the afternoon jaunt to the gayest part of the town, the hours spent in

flânochant before shop windows, gloating over splendours which, according to Lisette, might some day be within her reach.

‘If you once make a success money will pour in upon you like a river,’ said Lisette.

Hector de Valnois had written a couple of *patois* songs on purpose for Pâquerette. They had been set by his friend of the Palais Royal orchestra, and one afternoon he took this gentleman to the rue Franch-colline to hear Pâquerette sing. He was delighted with her voice and her appearance—told her she wanted one year of severe training, under a first-rate master—by which description he evidently meant himself—and that she might then make her *début* at the Palais Royal itself. He said this with the air of a man who could conceive no grander arena, who knew of no higher pinnacle. To him the Palais Royal among theatres was as Cotopaxi among mountains. The only difference was in the degree of inaccessibility, and that whereas nobody ever got to the top of Cotopaxi, artists of rare merit have from time to time succeeded in getting engaged at the Palais Royal.

Monsieur de Valnois left Paris within a week of this visit. He was going for a ramble in his beloved Rhineland, the country in which his student-life

had been spent—the land of music, romance, legend, metaphysics, which he pretended to love ever so much better than the soil from which his race had sprung. He locked up his apartment in the rue Montorgueil, gave the key to the ‘portress, took with him for his only luggage a very small valise, and a copy of Goethe’s ‘Faust,’ and for all his resources five hundred francs, just received from a publisher, and he shook the dust of Paris from his feet. When the five hundred francs were gone he would live from hand to mouth, sending an article to the papers now and then, and living on credit at his inn till the editor sent him his pay. It was a happy-go-lucky life which suited his temperament, a more innocent life than he could live in Paris—a life under blue skies, beside blue waters, amidst vine-clad hills—a life which regenerated him, he declared, when the white-hot fever of Paris had dried up his brains and his blood.

Pâquerette missed him when he was gone, though she had seen him but seldom. There was one person less to praise her; and his praise had been so much the sweeter than all other praise because of the flavour of aristocracy that hung about his person—an indescribable refinement of tone, and manner, and bearing which distinguished him from everyone else she knew.

Nearly three months had gone since that dark, wintry morning when Ishmael found the fugitive of Saint-Antoine crouching in the corner of his staircase, and in all that time there had been no sign or token of the old grandmother in the rue Sombreuil. Whatever steps Mère Lemoine had taken for the recovery of her orphan grandchild had been harmless to Pâquerette. Ishmael had scrupulously avoided the neighbourhood of the rue Sombreuil, lest his very appearance there should excite suspicion. He had warned Madame Morice against any hint of Pâquerette's whereabouts to the sisters Benoît. The only wonder was that Pâquerette had not been recognised in the streets of Paris by some wanderer from the faubourg beyond the Place de la Bastille. Yet, on the other hand, the sons and daughters of Saint-Antoine are for the most part local in their habits, and the boulevards and the Palais Royal are to them as another country. And again, Pâquerette's personal appearance had been so altered by Madame Moque's training that she might be said to have been improved out of all semblance to her former self. Who would have recognised Cinderella of the rue Sombreuil in the young *bourgeoise* dressed in a black silk gown, a shepherd's plaid shawl, and neat straw bonnet and black veil?

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The time had gone by, and Pâquerette had been unassailed ; and now Ishmael thought the day had come when he might venture to reconnoitre the harridan’s hole, and find out what dangers might wait for his *protégée* in the future. So one evening in Holy Week, a clear April twilight, he descended from the heights of Belleville after his day’s work was done, and entered the domain of Saint-Antoine. He did not intend to show himself to Mère Lemoine. He wanted to find out from the neighbours how she was living, and whether she had reconciled herself to the loss of her grandchild.

The sky was golden yonder towards the Barrière de l’Etoile, but in these narrow slums, and amidst these tall old barracks of Sainte-Marguerite and Saint-Antoine darkness was already filling the corners, and brooding over the lower windows, and lurking in the passages and courtyards. In the quadrangle which had been Pâquerette’s playground, the shades of evening hung heavy and thick, and candlelight shone, yellow and dim, behind many of the windows in that stone well of humanity—windows which made patches of sickly light on the dank black walls. But there was no gleam of light in either window of Mère Lemoine’s ground-floor. The door, which Ishmael had always seen open, was now firmly shut, and

on going close up to it, he was just able to distinguish the words, *à louer présentement*, scrawled with chalk upon the greasy black door. Mère Lemoine had removed herself and her household gods to some other habitation. It might be that she had found a cheaper shelter in some garret under the tiles above his head yonder, where the roof was still faintly lighted by yellow gleams from the western sky.

Ishmael looked in at the little den of a room near the gateway, which served at once as habitation and point of espial for the porter and his wife.

The porter was mending shoes by the light of a guttering candle, the portress was frying some curious portion of a sheep's anatomy with a large admixture of onion. The reek of the onions, the tallow-candle, the shoe-leather and cobbler's-wax, burst upon Ishmael in a warm gust as he opened the door.

'Can you tell me where to find Mademoiselle Benoît?' he asked.

The portress looked at her family of keys, hanging in three rows on a numbered board.

'On the fourth story, the first door in the passage to the right. There must be one of them at home, for the key is gone,' she said.

'The big Lisbeth came in half-an-hour ago,'

said the cobbler, without looking up from his shoe.

The big Lisbeth. It was she who had talked to him so gravely about Pâquerette, who had spoken of him as her admirer. He had some embarrassment at the idea of being taken to task once again by this strong-minded young woman. But he did not shirk the interview. He mounted the murky staircase, where a smoky oil lamp at each landing accentuated the gloom, and he knocked at the door to which the portress had directed him.

‘Come in,’ cried a brisk voice, and he entered.

The room was as neatly kept as his own—beds shrouded by red and white curtains; a table laid for supper; books, flowers; and the Citizen King and his Queen smiling on the wall yonder, on each side of the little gilded shell which held holy water, decorated piously with the sprays of palm brought home from last Sunday’s service.

And this was the apartment of girls who worked for their living. Why should not Pâquerette so work, and so live?

‘Monsieur Ishmael!’ cried Lisbeth, throwing aside her needlework, and going straight up to him with an intent look in her clear, kind eyes; ‘you have come to tell me about Pâquerette—poor little Pâquerette—who disappeared three months ago.’

‘Why should you suppose that I know anything about her, Mademoiselle?’ asked Ishmael, surprised by this sudden challenge.

‘I have made up my mind about that long ago. Either she is dead, or she has found a shelter somewhere with your help. Why should I think so? For this reason: upon this earth she could count only three friends—you—my cousins and I—who count as only one,—and death. She must have gone to one or the other the night she ran away.

‘You have guessed rightly,’ answered Ishmael. ‘She came to me, poor child, because she was afraid of death, and afraid to go to you. In this house she felt she could not be secure from her grandmother’s cruelty.’

‘And you,’ said Lisbeth, looking at him searchingly, almost imploringly; ‘there might be a worse cruelty practised by you—the cruelty of strength against weakness, cunning against innocence—the kind of cruelty which men have been practising towards women ever since the world began. I know that you admired her, that she loved you!’ continued Lisbeth passionately. ‘If you have wronged her——.’

‘I have not wronged her. I have done the best that lay in my power. I am here now to ask your advice. A young woman’s destiny is

a problem not so easily solved as I once thought. As to love, that is all nonsense. Pâquerette came to me because I was a strong man, able to protect her and myself against an old shrew’s claws, and because I lived a long way from her grandmother’s den. For choice she would rather have gone to you. And now first tell me about Mère Lemoine. Is she dead?’

‘Not to my knowledge. She has been gone from here about six weeks.’ Her habits were abominable—she was almost always tipsy, or at least stupified by drink, and her neighbours complained to the landlord that they were in peril of being burnt in their beds, as it was more than likely she would set the house on fire some night. As she was very much in arrear with her rent, he did not stand upon ceremony. She was turned into the street, and her goods and chattels, which she had reduced to the lowest ebb by pawning, were seized and sold. No one knows where she went or what became of her.’

‘Then it is to be hoped that this old hag will never be heard of again, and that Pâquerette may live the rest of her days in peace.’

After this Ishmael told Lisbeth all that had happened since Pâquerette’s flight, and explained his difficulties in dealing with such a delicate

matter as a young woman's destiny. On one side were Madame Moque, Hector de Valnois, and Pâquerette herself, urgent for a public career; on the other the alternative seemed only a semi-starvation, a life which, to be honest, must needs be one long slavery, ground to the dust by hard taskmasters, wedded to abject poverty.

'Woman's work is wretchedly paid in Paris, I grant,' said Lisbeth; 'but with frugality one can manage to exist. My cousins and I live comfortably enough. But then there are three of us, and we work very hard. We have worked ever since we were old enough to hold our needles. Poor Pâquerette has never been taught to do anything useful. No wonder she wants to get her bread by singing.'

'Will you go and see her?' asked Ishmael. 'You might be able to give her some good advice.'

'I will go to her with all my heart. I will help her with all my heart, if I can,' answered Lisbeth cordially.

And then she and Ishmael shook hands and parted.

'Forgive me for having doubted you,' she said, on the threshold of her door. 'We women have been so badly treated for generation after

generation, that we have learnt to look upon man as our natural enemy.’

Feeling himself safe now in pursuing his inquiries about Mère Lemoine, Ishmael questioned the porter, who told him that the old woman had been seen on the outskirts of Paris, bent nearly double under a ragpicker’s basket, and that it was supposed she had migrated to a settlement on the boulevard de la Revolte, near Clichy, a kind of fastness of the dangerous classes known as the *Cité du Soleil*, and chiefly inhabited by rag-pickers.

Lisbeth went to the rue Franch-colline on the following evening, after her work. It was the eve of Good Friday, and there was no performance at the Palais de Cristal; so Madame Moque and her pupil were both at home in the little yellow-curtained *salon*, while Monsieur Moque was busy below selling his *charcuterie* to those among the working classes who did not keep their Lenten fast.

The two women were engaged in the manufacture of a bonnet for Pâquerette, a new bonnet made out of the jetsam and flotsam of Lisette’s old days of service, which had left her a store of silks and ribbons, laces and splendid scraps, hoarded in old trunks and portmanteaux.

Pâquerette was to appear in the new bonnet on Easter Sunday, when they were to go to Vincennes for the afternoon with Ishmael. Perhaps there would be dancing, as on that other Sunday which marked the beginning of Pâquerette's womanhood.

The girl dropped her work and flew to Lisbeth's arms. She was scarcely taken by surprise, as Ishmael had called in the afternoon to tell her of his visit to the rue Sombreuil.

'*Mon ange!*' she exclaimed; 'how glad I am to see you again!'

Lisbeth kissed her heartily, and then held her at arms' length for a minute or so, scrutinising her gravely, severely even.

'And so am I glad to see you, *mon amour*; but if we had met in the street I should hardly have known you. I never saw such a change in anyone.'

'For the better, I hope!' said Lisette, whisking up a bit of blue silk, and giving her needle and thread a vindictive jerk.

She was not delighted at Lisbeth's visit, regarding her as an interloper, likely to side with Ishmael, and to give troublesome advice.

'I suppose most people would call the change for the better,' answered Lisbeth, with her un-

compromising candour; 'but I don't like to see my little Pâquerette look such a demoiselle. She has to work for her living, poor child; and it's a pity to look above one's station.'

'Happily no one will ever accuse you of that,' replied Lisette. 'As for Mademoiselle Pâquerette, it is so much the better for her that she has a little air of a born lady, which only wanted to be developed by a clever friend. And as for getting her living, by-and-by, there is work and work; and my little friend here has it in her power to make her fortune if she likes, without soiling the tips of her fingers.'

And then Madame Moque held forth upon the folly of Pâquerette's friend, Monsieur Ishmael, who wanted to deprive her of a noble career.

Pâquerette began to feel uncomfortable, on perceiving that her old and her new friend were not likely to get on very well together. She asked affectionately after Pauline and Antoinette, and hoped she should see them soon.

'We are going to Vincennes on Sunday,' she said. 'There is to be a fair, Monsieur Moque says. How I wish you could all come with us, or meet us there! You would not mind, would you, Madame Moque?'

Lisette declared that nothing could be more

blissful than such an addition to the party, and Lisbeth accepted the invitation. There would be no overpowering burden of obligation. The entertainment would be a kind of picnic, in which everybody would pay his or her share.

Sunday came—Easter Sunday, and the early masses in the grand old Paris churches were glorified by sunlight streaming through painted glass, and the sky above the white beautiful city, the broad winding river, was like a summer heaven, blue and cloudless. Ishmael rose soon after dawn and walked to the *cité* to hear mass in Nôtre Dame. He wore a frock coat now on Sundays, and on week-day evenings when he had occasion to leave the workmen's quarter; and he wore his coat with an easy air, which made him altogether different from his fellow-workmen in their Sunday clothes. With him the blouse was an accident, the coat an old habit. People turned and looked at him in the streets, so superior was that tall figure, with the broad chest and herculean shoulders, and the kingly carriage of the head, to the effeminate and fine-drawn form of the typical Parisian. The son of the sea and the sand-marshes yonder, reared in sunlight and wind, storm and rain, was of another breed from the townsman, born of long generations of townsmen.

After mass Ishmael breakfasted at a *crémérie* near the cathedral, and then set out to walk to Vincennes, where, just in that spot on which he and Pâquerette had met for the first time nearly a year ago, he found her to-day, with Monsieur and Madame Moque—animated, smiling, blushing, in her new bonnet, trimmed with broad straw-coloured ribbon, and with blue cornflowers nestling against her pale brown hair.

She was quite a different creature from the Pâquerette of last year, in her borrowed cotton frock, and little *grisette* cap. Then she had looked a shy, simple child, to whom everything in life was new and strange. To-day she was a woman, in the glory of early womanhood, conscious of her power to charm—looking at Ishmael shyly still, with those liquid blue eyes; but the clear brightness of those beautiful eyes told a new story. Pâquerette had acquired the rudiments of coquetry.

Monsieur Moque had brought a couple of commercial friends from the rue Franch-colline, and Madame Moque had invited the soprano from the Palais de Cristal, with her husband, the baritone, the Rigoletto, the Figaro, who had sung in Italian Opera for one brief season at Bordeaux, about fifteen years before, and who never forgot

those early triumphs on the lyric stage. The Benoît girls were punctual, and with their arrival the party was complete.

The wood was crowded with holiday people. There was a fair going on in the Cours de Vincennes, the great broad highway beyond the Barrière du Trône, and towards this festival they bent their way, soon after their picnic luncheon, guided by the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums, the clamour of thousands of voices. It was the ginger-bread fair ; such a crowd of joyous humanity, —fathers, mothers, children, lovers, *galopins* and *galopines*, *voyous* and *torchons*, Gavroche and all his brotherhood—such a crowd as Pâquerette had never beheld before to-day. She clung to Ishmael's arm as they entered the great wide boulevard of booths, amidst the din of trumpets, fiddles, and concertinas, pandean pipes, cymbals and drums, bells ringing, women laughing—amidst the reek of brasiers on which men and women were frying sausages, fritters, fish—amidst the clash of swords and the trampling of horses, while above every other sound in the fair swelled the roar of the multitude, rising and falling with a hoarse and sonorous cadence, like the rolling breakers of a stormy sea.

Pâquerette gazed in bewilderment at the shows, the wild beasts, conjurers, giants, dwarfs, swings,

merry-go-rounds. There were shooting galleries without number, learned dogs, phenomenal children, acrobats, coco-merchants with their tin fountains, hawkers of every description, street musicians of every order. On such a day as this it was not easy to get away from the crowd, nor were Ishmael's companions by any means eager for solitude, while the attractions of the fair were still fresh and dazzling. It was the first fair that Pâqueretté had ever seen, The circus riders, the acrobats, the clowns, the learned pigs were all new to her. She clasped her hands and opened her eyes wide with rapture at every fresh figure in the vast kaleidoscope of moving, joyous humanity. For her all the joy was real: the painted faces were beautiful; the tawdry muslin and gilt paper, the spangles and gaudy colours, were things to charm and dazzle.

Ishmael, who had seen a good many such sights in his year of Paris life, was interested and amused by the girl's pleasure. He took her into the booths and the circuses, to see the amazons flying through paper hoops, the conjurors changing pocket-handkerchiefs into live rabbits, boiling pigeons alive, and bringing them out of the saucepan unharmed by so much as the rumpling of a feather. He stood by patiently while gipsies told her fortune, assuring

her that there was a tall dark man with a good heart towards her. He bought her gingerbread and bonbons, fairings of all kinds. He let her drink the cup of pleasure to the dregs. He refreshed her with *brioche*s and innocent red currant syrup; and then, when all the wonders of the show had been exhausted, when the roar of voices began to have a hoarse and hollow sound, when the clash of brass, and the clang of strident laughter waxed discordant, they two wandered together away from the broad highway and its avenue of painted booths, into the outskirts of the wood of Saint-Mandé—not a very lonely spot, for there were other wanderers, arm in arm, at every turn, couples who looked like lovers—here and there a happy pair, as if unconscious of an external world, with girlish waist encircled by manly arm, *grisette*'s neat little cap reclining on blouse's shoulder.

‘You must be tired, I’m afraid,’ said Ishmael; ‘it has been a long afternoon.’

The sun was setting yonder behind western Paris; the dust-laden atmosphere above the fair was full of yellow light, against which golden haze the naphtha lamps of the booths began to show red and angry, like the bleared eyes of a drunkard—earthy, sensual, as compared with that

heavenly radiance which touched all things with beauty.

'Tired! Not the least in the world. I never had such a happy day,' answered Pâquerette, with her sweet joyous voice, that voice which in speech or song had ever the same bird-like trill. 'And to think that you would like to shut me up in a convent, to bury me in a big stony prison, from which I should never get so much as a peep at such a scene as this.'

It was the first time she had ever thus challenged him—the first time that they two, together and alone, had argued the question of her destiny.

'Don't say that I would like to shut you in a convent, Pâquerette,' replied Ishmael, gravely reproachful. 'I should like to do what is best for your own happiness here and hereafter.'

The girl shrugged her shoulders and made a wry face at that word hereafter. The world which it represented was such a long way off. Why should one be troubled about it? People shut themselves up in convents for the sake of that hereafter. It was for that they rose at untimely hours, and went to hear masses in the bleak early morning. It was for that they deprived themselves of all manner of pleasures. The very idea was a bugbear.

'Why should I not be a singer? Why should

I not be an actress?' urged Pâquerette. 'That would be best for my happiness, that would make me quite happy. Yes, even if I never rose any higher than that girl we heard singing in the booth just now; and I am sure I can sing better than she does.'

'Do you think that her life is a happy one, Pâquerette? My poor child, you don't know what you are talking about. Those poor creatures, whose red lips are one perpetual smile, lead an existence as wretched as ever yours was in the rue Sombreuil. They have to endure toil, scanty fare, miserable lodgings, hard weather, vilest language, blows even.'

'I would rather lead such a life than go into a convent,' Pâquerette murmured doggedly.

'You shall not go into a convent. I told Madame Moque weeks ago that I would not persuade you even to try the convent life against your will.'

'Then why not let me be a singer? I am a burden to you now, useless, costing you money every week. Let me be a singer, and I shall earn my own living. Madame Moque says I shall make a fortune—Monsieur de Valnois said so—and his friend at the Palais Royal. They must know. And it is such a pleasure to me

to sing. To win a fortune like that, without hard work, just by doing the thing which one likes best in the whole world—think how delightful that must be! And you deprive me of that happiness.’

She looked up at him pleadingly, piteously, her large blue eyes brimming over with tears. She wounded him to the quick by her reproaches, half petulant, half pitiful. Never had she been lovelier in his sight than she was at this moment, leaning upon his arm—a slender, willowy figure—a fragile, exquisite, useless thing—like some lovely parasite hanging from a branch of a grand old ceiba tree in the depths of a Guatemalan forest. Tears too in those pathetic eyes; the first reproachful tears that a woman had ever shed for any act of his.

‘My child, my heart,’ he murmured tenderly, ‘you must know that I have no authority over you, no power to forbid or to deny you anything. If you must be a stage-singer—a mountebank to be applauded by a gaping crowd—to have coarse things said about you—vile looks gloating on your beauty—ah, you don’t know, child, you can’t understand. If your heart is set on such a life I have no power to stop you—only if, on the other hand, you have any

regard for me, I beg, I implore you to avoid such a life as you would shrink from a pestilence, fever, death. No, you shall not be shut in a convent, my treasure. That would be a kind of murder—like catching a butterfly with the bloom on its wings and shutting it between the leaves of a great heavy book. No, you shall not work for your living. I will work for you, I will cherish you. Be my wife, Pâquerette, my love and my delight, the joy of all my days, the glory of my life. The fortune shall be made, sweet one: but these strong arms of mine shall toil for it. Be my wife, Pâquerette.'

He had his arm round her, he drew her to his breast in the dying light, they two alone in the twilight, in an avenue of budding limes. He held her close to his loudly-beating heart, looking down at her with dark passionate eyes that had a power stronger than any vanities or fancies of hers. She felt like a caught bird, yet with a blissful sense of all-pervading love and protection, courage and manhood guarding and cherishing her, which made captivity very sweet.

She gave him back his kiss with a faint langourous sigh.

'Does that mean yes, Pâquerette?' he asked, looking tenderly down at the fair girlish face.

‘It means whatever you like,’ she answered softly; ‘you are the master.’

And this ended, for a while at least, the difficult question of Pâquerette’s destiny.

CHAPTER VI.

‘BEHOLD THOU ART FAIR, MY LOVE.’

THE enigma of Pâquerette’s destiny was solved ; there was no more difficulty, no more doubt or incertitude. She was to be married to Ishmael, otherwise Sébastien Caradec, as soon as the law would allow. One obstacle which might have hindered an immediate union between the mason and his betrothed had been overcome by good fortune. Early in the year, Ishmael, by his proxy, Father Bressant, had drawn a lucky number in the conscription at Rennes, and was not called upon to carry arms for his country. This exemption left him free to pursue his career in Paris, and to take upon himself the responsibilities of matrimony.

Now, the marriage law of France is strictly paternal, and has been conceived with a strong feeling for the authority of parents, the safekeeping of children. A girl in her teens, a youth under five-and-twenty can hardly make a foolish marriage : for in order to be married at all he or she must

first obtain the consent of the parents, or of the one surviving parent, or in the case of an orphan, of that next of kin standing in the place of a parent. The law is a hard one sometimes for youth and true love, as in the case of poor little Criquette, in Monsieur Ludovic Halévy's tender story; but it more often works for the protection of sweet seventeen, who cannot elope with her groom, to be bound hard and fast in the bonds of matrimony at the nearest registry; and for impetuous youth at the university or the military depot, who cannot mate himself for life with the first pretty milliner he admires. Marriage in France is set round with a perfect *chevaux de frise* of precautions and difficulties; it cannot be huddled over in a hole-and-corner manner, without giving age and wisdom a chance of warning or remonstrance. Up to the age of thirty the intending bridegroom must respectfully call upon his parents to approve of his act, and must give them ample time in which to say their say upon the subject.

Before he lay down to rest on the night of Easter Sunday, Ishmael wrote a long letter to Father Bressant, telling him what had happened, and begging him to obtain Raymond's Caradec's consent to his marriage.

‘I am earning my own living, with daily improving prospects,’ he wrote. ‘I am never likely to cross my father’s path in life; I pledge myself never to ask pecuniary aid from him. I call upon him, therefore, not to thwart me in this most solemn act of my life, an act which involves the happiness and welfare of another.’

And then he went on to describe Pâquerette as an orphan—helpless, friendless, childlike, innocent. He was careful to say nothing about the lowness of her origin, but dwelt chiefly on her graces, on her solitary condition. It was a letter eminently calculated to touch the good priest’s heart; but the effect which such an appeal might exercise upon Raymond Caradec remained an open question. It is difficult to foresee the conduct of a man who has given up his life to the governance of a weak and selfish woman.

Father Bressant’s reply came by return of post. It was brief but full of kindness, and the envelope enclosed the following letter from Ishmael’s father: ‘I am told, Sébastien, that, having taken your own course in life, without respect for me, for your name and family, or for the rank in which you were born, you now desire to marry an obscure and penniless orphan, whose very name you shrink from disclosing. This desire on your

part I can only regard as the natural sequel of your rebellion and ingratitude. The runaway son finds his helpmeet naturally among the waifs and strays of society. If I had any hope that the severed tie between father and son could ever again be re-united I should resolutely refuse my consent to such an union; but as in every act of your life I recognise the influence of that tainted blood which makes you worse than a stranger to me, and as I feel the impossibility of reconciliation, I am inclined to let you have your own way; but only on the condition that you never resume the name of Caradec, which I am told you abandoned on leaving your home, and that you renounce your portion in the estate which I have to leave to my sons. That estate divided by three would be small to insignificance: for two it will be little better than a pittance. Since, as I understand, you are earning more than you can spend, and see your way to an increasing income, it can be a very small sacrifice to you to surrender your claim upon this modest heritage, for the profit of your two younger brothers, for whom you, as I believe, once entertained a warm affection. In a word, this is my ultimatum: Send me a formal renunciation of your claim upon my estate, and I will send you my formal consent to your

marriage with the young person whose name I have yet to learn.'

Ishmael smiled a bitter smile as he read the paternal letter.

'Monsieur de Caradec knows how to make a bargain,' he said to himself; 'but he is right in thinking that it will cost me very little to give up my birthright. I will let it go as lightly as Esau parted with his, and I will shed no idle tears afterwards for the loss of it. I once loved my brothers? Yes, and with me once means for ever.'

He answered his father's letter two days afterwards, enclosing a document which he had executed with all due formality in a notary's office.

'I renounce the name which I have long ceased to bear,' he wrote; 'I formally surrender a heritage on which I have never calculated. I began life a year and a half ago with no capital but a strong arm and a strong will. My affection for my brothers is not a thing of the past; it belongs to the present, and to the future; and if ever the day come that they need my help, they will find that fraternal love is something more than a phrase. I willingly, ungrudgingly forego whatever right I have upon your

property for the benefit of those two dear boys ; and I am, even in severance, your dutiful son,

SEBASTIEN.’

On Pâquerette’s side there were difficulties, but these were more easily overcome. Mère Lemoine was bound to her by no legal tie, but Mère Lemoine had brought her up, and the law recognised the claim of a putative grandmother who had given food and shelter from infancy upwards to a nameless grandchild. But Mère Lemoine had disappeared, and, taking her habits into due consideration, had in all probability gone to people the *tranchée gratuite*. It was held, therefore, after due enquiry and some delay, that the banns of marriage might be put up, and that, after a certain interval, Ishmael and Pâquerette might be united by civil and ecclesiastical ordinances, as they might themselves ordain.

These considerations and preliminaries occupied nearly three months, during which time Ishmael was working hard and gaining ground with his employers, while Pâquerette, still a lodger over the pork-butcher’s shop, seemed to be very happy. She had a good deal to do for Madame Moque,

who was clever in saving herself trouble when a pair of younger hands and feet were at her disposition. She had also her *trousseau*, bought with a little sum of money given her by Ishmael, to prepare; and this involved much plain sewing, at which Pâquerette was not particularly expert, although she had made considerable progress since those early days when Lisbeth Benoit taught her to mend her gown, and made her a present of a thimble.

For recreation, for delight, she had the wheezy little piano, and never did a Madame Pleyel or a Liszt derive more rapture from the *chef-d'œuvre* of an Erard or a Kriegelstein than wafted Pâquerette's young soul skyward upon the cracked and tinny tones of that little worn-out cottage. Her own voice ripened and strengthened with every week of her life. It was no longer to be spoken of as that *petit brin de voix* which might be just enough for a babyfied *patois* song. It was now a pure and fine soprano; and Pâquerette could sing Gilda's part in the great Rigoletto quartette with a force and a passion that startled her instructress.

'You ought to come out at the opera,' said Lisette. 'It is a sin for you to marry. Artists should never marry. Marriage is almost as bad

for a genius as a convent. It means self-sacrifice for life.’

‘But you married,’ argued Pâquerette, who saw no reason why she should not marry Ishmael first—that good Ishmael who was so kind to her—and go on the operatic stage afterwards.

‘I married before I was secure of my position as an artist,’ answered Lisette, ‘and I have repented my weakness ever since. Moque is a good fellow, but he is a clog. I should have been at one of the boulevard theatres years ago if I had remained single.’

Madame Moque was the only person who did not cordially approve of Pâquerette’s betrothal to Ishmael. She praised Ishmael’s generosity in wedding the nameless waif; but she bewailed the waif’s sacrifice of an artistic career, a career which, managed and directed by her, must needs have been triumphant. Ishmael might have made a much better marriage, she urged. Pâquerette would have been happier single. But in these opinions Madame Moque was strenuously opposed by the three Benoît girls, who came by turns to see Pâquerette, who helped in the preparation of the *trousseau*, and who were never tired of praising Ishmael, and congratulating their little friend upon her good fortune.

‘If heaven would send me such a man,’ said Pauline, unconsciously quoting Shakespeare.

Ishmael had made all his arrangements for his wedded life. He had descended from his eerie under the tiles to a comfortable and comparatively spacious apartment on the second floor, consisting of a *salon*, bedroom, and kitchen, with a little fourth room—a mere closet, with a narrow window commanding a back lane, which would do for his study. Pâquerette and he, accompanied by Lisette, had made numerous voyages of discovery among the second-hand dealers of Paris, and had brought home treasure in the shape of chairs, tables, and an *armoire* made under the First Empire, in that pseudo-classical style of art which has so long been a drug in the market. Ishmael, with his discriminating eye for form and mechanism, was the last person to be contented with cheap newly-made furniture, all trick and varnish and green wood. He wandered from broker to broker, till his glance lighted on some fine old piece of furniture wheeled into a corner, rejected by the frivolous, scorned by the fashionable; but as solid in its construction and as true in its lines as an old wooden man-of-war. And thus for a few hundred francs he secured some choice old pieces of cabinet-work which gave his little

salon a look of sombre grandeur. It in no wise resembled the prosperous workman's sitting-room. It had the air of a quiet scholar's study, a retired diplomatist's sanctum. Lisette shrugged her shoulders, and said that the room was *triste*.

‘You must have yellow curtains like mine,’ she protested, ‘or your *salon* will be the gloomiest in all Paris.’

But Ishmael resolved that he would not have yellow curtains, least of all yellow curtains like Lisette's. He and Pâquerette took their summer-evening rambles in all the faubourgs of Paris, and one night, not very remote from the dome of Sainte-Genève, Ishmael found some old tapestry curtains in a shabby little *bric-à-brac* shop, which he felt were the things he wanted for his sitting-room. Pâquerette at first condemned them as dingy; but on their merits being explained to her, and on her being told that they exactly resembled some curtains which Ishmael had seen in a château in Brittany, she began to think better of them. Her education in the little yellow *salon* over the pork-butcher's shop was not without fruits. She was beginning to have grand ideas, vague yearnings for splendour and finery, a dim fancy that Nature had intended her to be a lady.

At last, in the golden days of early June, while the white blossoms of the chestnut trees in the Tuileries gardens were falling in feathery showers upon the grass, like snow in summer, when the hawthorns were still in bloom in the Bois, and the delicate fragrance of acacias glorified the air of the suburbs, came the morning of Pâquerette's wedding day. It was a Saturday, favourite day for humble weddings, since it leaves the interval of Sunday for the bridal party to take their pleasure, before bridegroom and bride go back to the daily round of toil. Lisette had suggested Saturday, and Ishmael had obeyed. Lisette had further suggested a wedding dinner in the Palais Royal on Saturday evening, and a jaunt to Bougival, with a picnic by the water-side, on Sunday. But here, to the lady's disappointment, Ishmael announced that he had plans of his own. He had obtained leave of absence for the Monday and Tuesday after his wedding, and he meant to take Pâquerette on a little excursion to the woods of Marly and St. Germain, and then on to Fontainebleau, travelling by *diligence* as far as possible, so as to see the most they could of the country, taking their valise with them, and stopping at humble inns on the road.

‘Pâquerette adores the woods,’ he said. ‘I have never forgotten how enchanted she was with the

flowers and butterflies at Marly last year. I want to renew that experience.’

Lisette smiled a bitter smile.

‘Experiences of that kind are not so easily repeated,’ she said. ‘I don’t think Pâquerette cares very much about flowers and butterflies now she has seen the fashionable faubourgs of Paris.’

‘Instead of a wedding dinner next Saturday, I shall ask you and Moque and our other friends to dine with us the Sunday after our return, and then you will be able to judge what kind of housekeeper Pâquerette will make,’ pursued Ishmael, without noticing Madame Moque’s interruption.

The marriage thus arranged was conducted very quietly. The only guests were the three Benoît girls, Monsieur and Madame Moque, and a fellow-workman of Ishmael’s, an *esprit fort* and orator of the clubs, who acted as best man. The *mairie* on this sunlit Saturday morning was a nest of bridal parties, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, from youth to infancy, all in new clothes, washed, frizzed, pomaded for the occasion. The *maire* with his tricoloured scarf and little red morocco book, the *greffier* with his big register, had a formidable air, and the little crowd rose *en masse* at the entrance of these authorities.

Then came solemn questions, bridegrooms and brides were each addressed by name, and formally interrogated; fathers and mothers present were questioned as to their consent to each union, the answers to be clearly and loudly given, so as to be heard by all present, which in most cases they were not. The *greffier* read certain articles of the civil code, setting forth the duties and rights of husband and wife—all this being done with the summer wind blowing freely through wide-open doors, to show that the ceremony is a public act; and then the *maire* declared these persons united in marriage, the registers were signed, the ceremonial was finished.

‘Remember the poor, if you please,’ cried one of the officials; and each, as he or she went by, dropped an offering into a bag upon the table. Very microscopic some of these offerings; but they are many of them verily like the widow’s mite, the gift of those who have but little to give.

Ishmael was too good a Catholic to dispense with the blessing of the Church on this solemn sacramental act of his life. Within half-an-hour after leaving the *mairie* Pâquerette and he were kneeling before the high altar in a shadowy old church on the edge of the eleventh *arrondissement*, and in the parish in which Ishmael had his domicile.

When this solemnity was accomplished the bridal party repaired to a quiet little restaurant near Madame Morice's shop, where the grocer and his wife met them, and where a comfortable breakfast had been ordered for the party. And here at two o'clock Pâquerette and her husband bade their friends adieu, and started with their modest luggage in a fly for the office of the *diligence* which still plied between Paris and Marly le Roi. They were to begin their wedded life in the little inn with the garden, where they had dined last St. John's Day.

CHAPTER VII.

AND IT BROUGHT FORTH WILD GRAPES.

NEARLY two years had gone by since that wedding morning at the *mairie*. It was the springtide of 1854, and Ishmael and Pâquerette had lived together through the sunshine and the cloud of a married life which seemed somewhat long to look back upon in the minds of both. It had been a period of joy and of sorrow—of joy, for Pâquerette had found it a sweet and happy fate to be the beloved of an honest and noble-minded husband; of sorrow, for the first fruits of their love had been garnered yonder in the field of many graves. Pâquerette could see the multitude of headstones, the Egyptian sarcophaguses and Greek temples, white and ghostly on the slope of the hill, when she looked out of her bedroom-window on moonlit nights; and she fancied she could see the very spot where her baby girl lay, under a little garden of flowers. For some months of Pâquerette's life she never went to bed without looking out of that

window, and towards that grave, while she murmured a prayer for her dead. Not a week passed in which she did not make her pious pilgrimage to the cemetery, and spend an hour beside her baby's grave. Hers were the hands that kept the flowers in order in that tiny garden, among so many other such gardens, some tawdry, some fine, in the overcrowded city of the dead. Ishmael had bought the *concession perpetuelle* of this little plot of ground. The leasehold, which suffices for middle-class Paris in a general way, was not lasting enough for his and Pâquerette's sorrow for the fair flower that had withered in its earliest bloom. They wanted to be sure that no lapse of years would make any difference to that one little bed.

The first year of Pâquerette's married life had been perfectly happy. First there had been the delight, the pride, the importance of being mistress of her little *ménage*, her *salon* with its fine old furniture and tapestry curtains, her own piano—Ishmael's wedding gift, and a gift far beyond his means at that period—a new piano, with a full, rich tone which was as the organ of St. Eustache in comparison with that worn-out tin kettle upon which Lisette accompanied her nasal melodies. Pâquerette adored her piano, and at Ishmael's suggestion she took music

lessons from a little old professor whose father had helped Jean Jacques Rousseau in the partition of his operettas, and had played the violin in the little theatre at Versailles where Marie Antoinette acted. The professor was a frail old link with the historic past, faded, and withered and snuffy, very proud of relating those *souvenirs* of the gracious days before the Revolution, which his father had bequeathed to him as his only heritage. He had discoursed of these things so often that he had come almost to confound his father's personality with his own, and to talk as if it were he who had been in the orchestra when the Queen sang, as if he had been a collaborateur of that wonderful Jean Jacques.

‘I can see it all as I tell you the story,’ he would say; ‘the place, the people, they are all before me, vivid, real. I knew them all so well, you see.’

Ishmael had a fancy for the little old man, who had the refinement and somewhat over-accentuated courtesy of those long departed days, an air of impalpable powder, invisible patches and pigeon wings. He asked him to dinner sometimes on a winter Sunday, and let him tell his stories all the evening. The professor was legitimist to the tips of his nails, and held the house of

Orleans and the house of Bonaparte in equal contempt.

‘Charlatans both,’ he said; ‘only one is cleverer than the other. He is not afraid of spending money as the citizen-king was, and he knows how to make Paris comfortable for the Parisians. And, since to govern Paris is to govern France, he is likely to reign long and merrily.’

For music Monsieur Vielbois, the little old professor, gave Pâquerette only the works of the eighteenth century composers—quaint old melodies by Rameau, Lulli, Grétry, Monsigny—gavottes, minuets, ballet music of the old, old school. These prettinesses, which did not require much execution, Pâquerette played charmingly, with airy lightness, with delicate shades of expression, with perfect phrasing.

‘She has the finest ear of any pupil I ever taught,’ protested Monsiur Vielbois; ‘and she has a voice that would have made her fortune on the operatic stage.’

That suggestion of the ‘might have been’ always evoked a sigh from Pâquerette. She thought of that possible operatic career—those visionary successes and triumphs—as of a treasure she had sacrificed in order to marry Ishmael. He was very good to her. He did all he could

to make her life happy, and she told herself that she was happy; but that other life shone upon her fancy somewhere in cloudland like a dream of bliss.

In the summer of 1853 Pâquerette's baby was born, a lovely infant, with eyes that had a heavenly look which gave the father a thrill of fear as he bent over the cradle. Such a look was fitter for the skies than this dull earth—it seemed like a warning. The child lived for six months, and was the delight of the little home. Pâquerette nursed her baby, idolized her, but treated her a little too much as a child treats her doll, and had intervals of carelessness in the midst of her devotion. One such interval occurred in the winter, when the snow was on the roofs of Ménilmontant, and the graves in Père Lachaise were hidden under one great white pall. Monsieur Vielbois brought his pupil tickets for the opera, when the houses were thin on account of the hard weather. And Pâquerette, flurried and feverish all day in anticipation of the evening's bliss, hurried off to the rue le Peletier at night, with one of the Benoît girls, leaving the baby in her cradle to the chance ministrations of a friendly neighbour on the third floor.

One such night the little one caught cold—a

mere nothing—a baby ailment—a touch of fever, the apothecary said, which a powder and a *tisane* would set right. But before Paris and the world were twenty-four hours older the fever was a raging fever, the delicate little frame was attacked with mortal disease; and within a week the little coffin was being made, and the cradle was a place of stillness, shrouded under white cambric.

Pâquerette grieved intensely—lamented passionately—would not be comforted. When the frosts and snows of January were over Ishmael sent her to Fontainebleau with one of the Benoît girls, hoping that change of air and scene would restore her to peace of mind, and give her the healthful sleep which had forsaken her pillow since the child's death. The change did something, and time did more; and now the year was wearing on which had been a new year while the earth was fresh above baby Claire's grave. Ishmael had named the child Claire, after his father's mother, whom he had only known as a tradition. He shrank from calling her by his own mother's name. It would have seemed an evil omen.

Pâquerette was not a good housekeeper. She was impulsive, a creature of whim and fancy, did things by fits and starts, sometimes working

tremendously, sometimes abandoning herself to idleness for days together.

Ishmael was at his work all day, and asked no troublesome questions when he came home in the evening, so long as Pâquerette was there to receive him. He was careless as to what he ate, and took a good or a bad dinner with equable indifference. Sometimes the dinner was a cold collation, something fetched hurriedly from the *charcutier's* at the last moment, Pâquerette having forgotten the dinner question altogether. Sometimes there was a decent *pot-au-feu*.

She employed a charwoman, the deaf old portress who kept the door below, who came to the second floor every morning to do all the rough work, so that Pâquerette's hands were never roughened by domestic drudgery. Her husband admired those pretty white hands.

'You must have good blood in your veins,' he said: 'you have the hands and feet of a patrician.'

Pâquerette gave her head a little toss.

'I have a conviction that my father was a gentleman,' she said; 'and that was why he would not own me.'

'If he was alive, and knew of your existence, and abandoned you to that den yonder, he was a

scoundrel, whatever his birth might be,' answered Ishmael warmly.

He had a knack of calling things by their right names.

'Ah! you don't know, he may have been some great person, hemmed round with difficulties—a tyrannic father, a proud mother. Who knows?'

Pâquerette had read plenty of novels in her long hours of leisure, the novels of the day—Georges Sand, Feydeau, Sue, Dumas, father and son. Her little head was stuffed with the romantic and impossible side of life. She despised Ishmael's dry-as-dust studies, far away from the flowery fields of sentiment and poetry. So different from his friend, Hector de Valnois, lately returned to Paris, and full of interest in Pâquerette, whom he found wondrously improved and refined by an education which had consisted for the most part of music-lessons and novel-reading. Pâquerette was fascinated with his sympathetic nature, his delightful way of looking at everything from the standpoint of art and beauty. She knew that her husband was clever: but his was a kind of cleverness upon which she set no value—a cleverness which made bridges, and built markets and slaughter-houses, and drained cities through loathsome subterraneous sewers. What was such talent as this compared with the genius

which could extemporise a song, words and music, and sing it divinely *en passant*—which could embody jest and fancy with the delicate lines of an airy pencil? Wit, mirth, art, comedy, tragedy, music, song, were all within the domain of Hector de Valnois; while Ishmael was distinguished only by an inordinate passion for hard work, a love of sheer drudgery, which seemed almost a mania.

What society could such a husband afford to a young wife, eager for new pleasures, now that the anguish of a first grief was a pain of the past, a sad thrilling memory? Ishmael grudged his wife no indulgence, thwarted her in no whim. But he could rarely share her pleasures. His days were full of toil, thought, anxiety. He had prospered beyond his most ardent hopes. He was the head and front of all things in the builder's yard at Belleville, that yard which he entered less than four years ago as a *gâcheur*. There was a talk of his being taken into partnership—a well-deserved reward, since it was his enterprise, his strength of character, and thorough mastery of the science of construction which had obtained for the house an important Government contract for the repair of the slaughter-houses at Belleville, Ménilmontant, and Villette, a contract

which brought renown and position to the firm. It was a small thing, perhaps, if set against the works of a Peto or a Brassey ; but it was the largest business the Belleville yard had ever had yet, and it scored high for Ishmael. There was the hope too that if ever the Imperial idea of a great central cattle-market and slaughter-house, in direct communication with all the railways, should come to be realized, Ishmael's firm would have a share in the work.

With increasing success came ever-increasing labour, plans, estimates, quantities, the whole science of mathematics as applied to iron and stone ; and when the long day of practical work was over, it was Ishmael's custom, after a brief interval of rest, to shut himself in his little study, the hermit-like cell opening out of his bedroom, and there to devote himself to figures and theory, sometimes working on till late in the night.

'It is not very lively,' Pâquerette said sometimes, with a shrug of her shoulders, when she spoke to Lisette Moque of her domestic life.

Lisette was the only person to whom she could safely grumble. The Benoît girls thought her lot all sunshine, and would have resented a murmur as a kind of treason. They were always

praising Ishmael and the happy little home, so superior to other homes, so peaceful, so secure. They came about once a month to a Sunday dinner, and these occasions, Monsieur Vielbois, the little antique professor assisting, had quite a family air. To Ishmael they were delightful—a respite from labour and calculation, a lull in the daily tumult, a glimpse of domesticity and affection. But after two years of married life Pâquerette began to find that there was a sameness. Those simple pleasures palled on her impatient young spirit. The long empty days gave her too much time for thought, since, after the baby's death, thought with Pâquerette only meant thinking about herself, her own pleasures, her own woes, the possibilities near and remote of her own life. She wasted very little of her thinking power upon Ishmael, considering him only as a person who went out in the morning and came home in the evening, who wanted to see the apartment neatly kept, and who must have dinner of some kind provided for him. From the early morning hours till dusk, Pâquerette had ample leisure for self-communing, for feeling the burden of the hours, pining for pleasures that were never likely to come in her way, regretting that fate had not made her——what? She hardly knew

what she would have chosen for her lot had the wheel of fortune been put into her hands, with power to stop it at whatever number she pleased. She would have liked to be something public and distinguished, a creature admired and beloved by all Paris, pointed at as she drove by, applauded almost to madness every night upon that vast stage of the opera house, where she had seen the audience thrilled and hushed in a charmed silence, breathless almost, while Bosio poured forth the wealth of her noble voice in 'Lucrezia' or 'Fidelio.' She would have liked to be a great singer, *the* great singer of the age. Or failing that, it must be sweet to be a famous beauty, a golden-haired divinity, like that fashionable enchantress whom she had seen often on the boulevards and in the Champs-Élysées—a mignon face, a figure delicate to fragility, almost buried amidst the luxury of a matchless set of sables, seated in the lightest and most elegant of victorias, behind a pair of thoroughbred blacks. She knew scarcely more than the name of this divinity, which seemed like the name of a poem—Zanita. Monsieur de Valnois laughed when she questioned him about Zanita. The little old professor frowned and shook his head.

' *Ces espèces* are the avenging angels of those

good women who were murdered in the Terror,' he said once. 'Those butchers of ninety-three wanted a world without princesses and queens; and what have revolutions and changes of dynasty given us instead of the great ladies of France? Zanita, and her sisters—a pestilence to decimate the city—a gulf of iniquity in which men are swallowed up alive, with their fortunes, their lands, their lives, their honour, their names even.'

The old professor was pale with indignation, as he spoke of the fair, frail, golden-haired divinity, distinguishable chiefly to the outer world by her diamonds, her sables, her horses, and her hotel: known best to the initiated by her epigrams, *à gros sel*. She was a kind of Undine-like creature, springing none knew whence, unless it were from the gutter. Her very country was unknown. Some said she was English, some declared she was American. Her French was the language of the faubourg du Temple, garnished with the graces of the quartier Bréda. She confessed to neither country nor kindred. She had begun her career as an orphan, but, on becoming a celebrity, she discovered that her establishment would not be complete without the maternal element, so she had mothers at her desire, always kept one on the premises, and

flung her out of doors when she became troublesome. These *mères postiches* had a knack of taking to the bottle.

Pâquerette, seeing this life of fine clothes and thoroughbred horses from the outside, fancied it a kind of earthly paradise, and thought that, next to being Bosio, she would like to be Zanita. She confessed as much once naïvely to Hector de Valnois, who sometimes called at his friend Ishmael's lodgings at dusk, before he went to his evening's amusements.

'My child, you have some of the qualities of the *métier*,' he answered, smiling at her—'the nameless, indescribable graces which go further than beauty. But it is too late: such a career as Zanita's must begin almost from the cradle. That fine flower of wit which fascinates and enchains Paris requires a particular hotbed for its development. No, Madame Ishmael, the stage is the arena for your attractions—a little song, a short petticoat, and, my faith, the town would be at your feet.'

'I shall never be allowed to sing that song,' cried Pâquerette, discontentedly. 'I suppose I am to be buried alive all my days in this dull, common-place room, staring at those everlasting sphinxes.'

She looked almost vindictively at that *garniture de cheminée* which had once seemed to her a thing of beauty and the pride of life. It was of true Empire style—a black marble dial with gold hands, supported upon two massive bronze sphinxes, another bronze sphinx at each end of the chimney-piece supporting a brazen candelabrum. In her moods of depression Pâquerette loathed those four sphinxes. She could not get out of the reach of their glacial metallic gaze. At such moments the sound of Hector de Valnois' step on the stair fluttered her pulses and stirred her heart with a sense of relief that was akin to rapture.

It meant the coming of youth, hope, gaiety, news of the outer world. It meant laughter, and life, and gladness.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘HOW WEAK IS THINE HEART!’

WHILE Ishmael was plodding steadily on at his trade, which seemed to Pâquerette so dull and ponderous a business that to think about it made her head ache, his friend of the rue Montorgueil was in high feather. Everything had prospered with Hector de Valnois since his return from that wander-year of his in the land of the Rhine and the Moselle, and amidst the pine-clad steeps of Tyrol. That time of wandering and poetic fancy, of desultory study and primeval innocence, had renewed his strength of mind and body. His father was dead, and he had inherited his little domain in the south; and was selling the patrimonial acres piece by piece, feeling that he had another estate in his brains—infinite, inexhaustible. He came back to Paris like a lion refreshed, like a young Samson whose shorn locks had grown again, and who felt within him the power to overthrow the temples of the Philistines. Some of the articles

about pictures, music, the drama, which he wrote at that period, were signed 'Samson, junior'; and he brought down the roof of many a Philistine temple, as represented by good, old, high-dried literary or artistic reputation. He cast in his lot with the young, the original, the untried, the spontaneous. He made fierce war against established renown. 'Because a man wrote a good book thirty years ago, are we to bow down and worship him for the bad book he writes to-day?' he asked. 'His books have been getting worse and worse every year, perhaps, and we have been wilfully blind to his decadence, adoring a tradition.'

He wrote savagely often, but with a playful lightness which gave a zest to his ferocity. His articles were full of variety, the man himself being a creature of many moods. He was in no wise a genius. He was imitative and receptive rather than original; but his power of imitation, his exquisite facility of appropriation, passed for spontaneous fire. Every new book he read gave him a fresh impetus. His style had all the charms, all the blemishes of youth; but such as it was his style pleased, and he was able at this time to earn an income which, if administered with care and frugality, would have left a surplus for laying by, but which, handled with supreme carelessness,

enabled him to live as a prince in the Bohemia of Imperial Paris.

He had exchanged his dingy apartment in the rue Montorgueil for an *entresol* in a fine old house in the rue de Grenelle, a house which in the days of Louis Quinze and Madame du Barry had belonged to one of the magnates of Paris, a prince of the Church. The stately reception rooms on the floor above Hector's nest were panelled, and the panels—painted with no mean art—were reversible. On one side appeared innocent landscapes and flower pieces, humming-birds, butterflies; but, touch a spring, and *crac*, each panel revolved on a swivel, and lo! the cardinal's *salon* was glorified by a series of mythological subjects, which sailed somewhat too near the wind to be seen by the uninitiated. In the glare of daylight, when the doors were open, and all the great world of Paris had the right of *entrée* in those splendid rooms, the prince of the Church appeared in his violet *soutane*, a solemn, stately figure, against a background of birds, and butterflies, and Arcadian vales and fountains; but at night, when the curtains were drawn and the doors were shut, and the wax candles in the silver sconces were lighted, and the tables were laid for the little supper, and the Duc de Richelieu and other choice spirits were expected, then Leda, and

Danae, and Latona, and Semele came out of the darkness, and smiled upon the orgie.

Hector's *entresol* consisted of four little low rooms opening one out of the other, like Chinese puzzle boxes. They were very snug little rooms; and though to an English mind they would have suggested stuffiness and everything unhealthy, no such objections presented themselves to a Frenchman.

Flushed with the success which had of late crowned his literary work, most of all by the vogue of his last *vaudeville* at the Palais Royal—*Un Mari en Vacance*—Valnois had furnished this miniature abode of his without counting the cost—all the more easily as he had so far neither paid for anything nor even looked at the upholsterer's or the *bric-à-brac* dealer's invoices. The rooms were decorated and furnished with a dainty elegance—a lightness, brightness, and luxurious puffiness and downiness of upholstery which savoured of the *petit maitre*, or even of the *petite dame du quartier Breda*. The chairs were of the *pouf* species, covered with crimson satin; the *guéridons* were of that graceful Louis Seize style which the Empress had lately brought into fashion by her quest of Marie Antoinette relics. Barbedienne bronzes and Oriental jars. choice

books in still choicer bindings, miniatures set in turquoise velvet, rare etchings of doubtful subjects adorned the walls. The *garniture de cheminée* was in sea-green Sèvres that had belonged to Madame Récamier. The *portières* were of old Gobelins tapestry which were supposed to have once screened the sanctuaries of Luciennes, and muffled the sound of royal speech and royal laughter from the ears of the *valetaille* in the antechamber. In a word, Monsieur de Valnois was now lodged as a poet, wit, playwright, and art critic—an authority on the beautiful—should be lodged, according to the eternal fitness of things, whatever might be the ultimate result to the tradesmen who had supplied the goods.

But it was not alone as the joint author of *Un Mari en Vacance* that Hector de Valnois was known to the Parisian public. He had lately published *Mes Nuits Blanches*, a volume of short poems—the jetsam and flotsam of his desultory youth, the concentrated expression of long days of idleness, long nights of unrest—the passionate cries of the young unchastened heart, so fierce in its longings, so vague in the midst of its intensity, so inconstant even at fever-point. Love, unbelief, the sickly envy of the poor and the badly placed against the rich and the renowned, the barren ambition of

the dreamer, all found their expression in this little book. The Muses are the father-confessors of unhappy youth; and to the Muses Hector de Valnois had revealed the darkest depths of his heart and mind. The result was piquant; the book was a success. All the critics praised, abused, condemned, applauded in a breath. Two poems, a page long, were quoted in almost every review. One—*Gethsemane*—was blasphemous to audacity. The other—*Cleopatra*—belonged to the order of composition which ought to be burned by the public hangman. But as both had a certain weird power, and were perfect in versification, Hector de Valnois' reputation as one of the coming men was an accomplished fact. Unhappily there are so many of those coming men who never arrive at the goal, who join the dismal ranks of the *Râtés*—the men who have missed fire, who die in early middle age—*voué au vert* perhaps—brain softened, limbs tremulous, the man himself numbered among the dead ever so long before the *pompes funèbres* send their hearse to carry him to the *tranchée gratuite* yonder in the cemetery where, he once dreamed, his tomb would rank with that of Abelard and Héloïse.

Hector's head was not turned by this favouring gale. He had always believed in himself; and he was in no wise surprised that the world called him

a genius. He wore his laurels modestly enough, as a matter of course: and he had his hats from the best maker in Paris. He abandoned his Bohemian style of dress for a more fashionable attire; but there was even yet a touch of unconventionality about his costume—a faint flavour of the student's quarter, the shabby thoroughfares of the *rive gauche*, in the vicinity of the Sorbonne, the highway of youthful footsteps, the place of cafés, and billiard tables, and political clubs, and concert-cellar, and the fervour and madness of student-life in general.

Hector loved the rue de Grenelle for two reasons: first, because of its old-world air, its grave and *grandiose* mansions, its glimpses of stately town garden—paradise of stonework and evergreens—its elegant seclusion, its aristocratic repose—every other house looking as if it were the abode of an ambassador or a minister of state; secondly, because it was within a few minutes' walk of some of the queerest old streets in Paris, and of the Luxembourg, and of the Art Schools. He had graduated in the Quartier Latin before he went to Heidelberg to take the degree he had failed to get in Paris at a German university. The wildest nights of his wild youth had been spent in some of those underground dens, those haunts where the music was

as vile as the liquor, the company viler than either, and where, all the same, youth fancied itself in a privileged atmosphere, and gloried in the idea of seeing life.

The taste for these underground concerts had left him. He had no inclination to revisit Les Ecossaises, or to renew his acquaintance with the Salamander, alias Crocodile, nor the Bas-Rhin, which a few years later was to be made famous by the feat of *Nini la Démocrate*, who, for a wager with a rival celebrity, *Hélène la Sévère*, drank fifty-five *bocks* in a single evening. Feats of a similar nature, though on a scale less lofty, had been performed even in Hector's time; and the houris who ministered to the revellers in these Circean haunts were chiefly distinguished for the number of glasses which they themselves could consume.

Hector no longer relished these underground orgies, but he had still a liking for the Quartier Latin, as for a friend of his youth; and he played billiards and talked politics, drama, art, and literature in one or other of the larger cafés three or four times a week. He had not forsaken any of his old friends on the strength of his new fame, least of all had he forsaken Pâquerette.

‘You are a great man now, and we shall never

see you any more,’ she said, pouting a little with lips that were rosier than of yore, when he showed her some of the reviews of his book.

‘You will see me only so much the oftener, if I am prosperous and happy,’ he said, smiling at her, smiling with a light in his eyes which meant so much more than she could read, and which thrilled her with a sense of mystery. ‘I shall come to you for inspiration: I never feel so full of ideas as when I have been spending an hour of happy idleness in this room of sphinxes.’

‘Oh, those sphinxes!’ exclaimed Pâquerette, with an impatient shrug. ‘How I detest them!’

‘I adore them. Chief sphinx of the sphinxes, most mysterious among the mysteries, is the sphinx who walks and talks and has dreamy blue eyes. I never fathom what *that* sphinx means. *Her* riddle is unguessable; and yet I cherish a hope that I shall guess it some day, and that the answer will mean bliss unspeakable.’

‘I wish you would not talk such unmeaning nonsense,’ said Pâquerette, walking to the window, with affected petulance.

She hardly knew what he did mean, but she knew that she was trembling—trembling so that she needed to lean against the window frame for support pretending to be looking out into the

dull, silent street, pretending to be interested in emptiness and nobody, which was all that was afforded by the prospect below her.

‘Are you going to the opera to-night? Rigoletto—with Ronconi, Mario—his last season, remember, and a new soprano.’

‘You know I adore Rigoletto. But you talk such nonsense. How can I go?’

‘Nothing more easy. You can go with Madame Moque.’

‘You have tickets that you can spare?’

‘I have a tiny box on the upper tier, which will just hold two people comfortably and a third uncomfortably. You and Madame Moque shall have the two comfortable seats, and I will look in for a few minutes in the evening.’

‘But you forget: Madame Moque has to sing at the Cristal.’

‘True,’ said Hector; ‘there is a difficulty. I suppose you could hardly go alone?’

‘Impossible; Ishmael would be angry.’

‘And your demoiselles Benoît—no, they have a puritanical air that would spoil our evening,’ muttered Hector, who had discovered some little time ago that the Benoît girls were suspicious of his relations with Pâquerette.

Pâquerette had her grief against her old

friends, too; for big Lisbeth had taken her to task one evening, after finding Monsieur de Valnois sitting at her piano in the dusk, and had told her in very plain language that the acquaintance of an agreeable idler of superior station and culture was not good for any young wife.

‘If Ishmael likes Monsieur Valnois, and does not mind his coming to see us, why should you find fault?’ asked Pâquerette.

‘I know what women are made of better than Monsieur Ishmael does,’ answered Lisbeth, bluntly. ‘No doubt he thinks you are an angel, and that you spend all the hours of his absence in thinking of him and praying for him. Do you think it would gratify him to know that you are listening to Monsieur Valnois’ songs, or watching Monsieur Valnois draw caricatures.’

‘My life is dull enough, even counting that relief,’ said Pâquerette, impatiently.

‘Your life was duller in the rue Sombreuil, where you were beaten and half starved,’ retorted Lisbeth, measuring her from head to foot with a look of cold contempt—a judicial look which weighed her in the balance and found her wanting.

She could not conceal her scorn for this weak

nature—too weak even for gratitude, the virtue of the humble-minded; too weak for constancy; too weak for honour. Lisbeth left the house without a word of adieu. She was too angry with Pâquerette for further speech. To have spoken any more would have been to open the floodgates of wrath long held in check. She, who so honoured Ishmael, was enraged at seeing how little his wife appreciated him. She shrugged her shoulders, and sighed heavily, as she walked away from the quiet street at Ménilmontant.

The Benoît girls from that hour became, in the mind of Pâquerette, persons to be avoided. She left off inviting them on Sundays, and made feeble excuses when her husband asked why they so seldom appeared in his home. He was too busy to be curious about trifles—busy with head and hands, weighted with the serious responsibilities of a growing trade, in which the master was a cipher as compared with the foreman.

No; the opera would lose half its delight if she were to go there under the severe eye of Lisbeth, or the keen, suspicious glances of Pauline or Toinette.

‘Could you not go alone, and let your husband suppose you under Madame Moque’s custody. We might invent a *relâche* at the Cristal,’ suggested

Hector, quite assured of Pâquerette’s longing to occupy a place in that little box on the uppermost tier.

‘Oh, but to deceive him!’ cried Pâquerette, reddening with shame.

‘What would it matter? There could be no harm in your going to the opera—with me. You would be as safe as with Ishmael himself. But I can see the way to a compromise. Madame Moque only sings once in the evening—her great song, *La Cuisinière d’en face*. She sings at nine o’clock. When her song is over she has only to put on her bonnet and shawl and come on to join you at the opera. She can escort you home afterwards; and etiquette and Ishmael will be satisfied.’

Pâquerette hesitated.

‘And I should have to go to the opera alone,’ she said.

‘What of that? Dress yourself plainly; take your ticket in your hand. You have only to present it, and you will be ushered into the box, where you can sit as quietly and as safely as if you were at mass.’

Pâquerette was a little frightened at the scheme. She had never been to the theatre or opera alone; never without Ishmael’s full consent and approval.

He had usually gone to meet her and her companion—had been waiting in front of the play-house when they came out. She had never yet gone to a theatre with Monsieur de Valnois. It was the first time he had suggested such a thing; and it seemed natural that he should give her this opportunity of hearing *Rigoletto*, remembering the second time they met—in the artists' room at the *Cristal*—and how he had talked to her about the new opera.

She hurried off to the rue Franch-colline, and after some persuasion, obtained Madame Moque's promise to join her at the opera after she had sung her grand *cuisinière* song, which she performed in character, with a white apron, bare arms, and a floury countenance. She would change her stage attire for a black silk gown and cashmere shawl with briefest delay, take a cab and drive to the opera house. She would be there before ten: in time for the quartette. Madame Moque, in her heart of hearts, cared not a straw for the quartette which she had heard murdered so often at her concert-hall; but she thought it very likely that Monsieur de Valnois would take them over to Tortoni's and treat them to ices after the performance; or he might, perhaps, go so far as to offer them a little supper at the *Maison dorée*.

The boulevard at midnight was Lisette's highest idea of Paradise. And for Ishmael? He would be sleeping the sleep of the industrious workman, and need never be told whether his wife went home early or late.

Ishmael was later than usual that evening, Pâquerette had prepared his dinner with more than her accustomed care. She had the table laid and everything ready at half-past six; and then finding that her husband did not return, she went to her room to dress. She had no inclination to dine alone—could not have eaten anything, even if her husband had been sitting opposite to her. She was feverish with expectation of pleasure, and with vague fears. Her hands trembled a little as she dressed herself in her pretty gray merino gown, her straw bonnet lined with pale pink plush, setting off the milky skin, lighting up the large blue eyes. She had a cashmere shawl—a real cashmere, which had cost five hundred francs, Ishmael's last gift. Her gloves, her boots, were perfect after their kind. She felt that she might stand before kings and be not afraid. Those fingers of hers, once so unskilled, had grown clever and deft enough now in the manufacture of pretty things for her own adornment. Her gowns and her bonnets were

the chief labour of Pâquerette's life. Her husband liked to see her prettily dressed—her grace and beauty gladdened his eye: and he never asked how much money she spent on the raw material. He thought her a model of good sense and economy because she made her own gowns.

When she was ready, and had given a last look at her image in the glass—a lily-face flushed with faint reflections of rose colour—she sat down hurriedly at Ishmael's *secrétaire* and wrote him a little note. She was going to the Italian Opera with Madame Moque, to hear Rigoletto—he knew how she had always longed to hear that divine opera—and Madame Moque would bring her home. She hoped he would not be angry—and that the beef would be good. He would only have to take the soup and the *bouilli* out of the saucepan when he wanted it.

She put the note on the dinner table, left the beef simmering on the stove, and tripped away—tripped with light foot along the road so many have travelled before her; the beaten track of sin, which begins in softness and verdure, between flowery banks, amidst the song of birds and the scent of roses; and which ends in a pathway of shards and ashes hemmed in with hedges of thorn and briar.

She was a little afraid of going into the theatre alone, even furnished with the box ticket which Hector had given her; but she was spared this difficulty, for as she turned into the Place Ventadour she almost ran into Valnois' arms.

‘I found I could get here early,’ he said, and they went into the big grand-looking opera house together, Pâquerette looking about her as they went along, flushed and breathless.

A great crash of drums and brass came from the orchestra, like a judgment peal, as they were going upstairs, and it scared Pâquerette almost as if it had been the last trump.

It was a long way to ascend. They went past the *foyer* with its gilded pillars and many mirrors—past corridor after corridor, were jostled by men and women in evening dress, until at last they came to the little box on the topmost tier. Then as Pâquerette drew aside the curtain and looked out, the glory and the splendour of the vast theatre burst upon her in a blaze of light, and colour, and diamonds, and beautiful women. It was a fashionable night, in the early days of the Empire. Yes, that was the Empress yonder in all her gracious beauty, fair as a lily, and with that coronal of golden hair which was a new and lovely image in the eyes of men; for it had not yet

been degraded and vulgarised by tawdry imitations. She was dressed in white, with a diamond cross upon her neck, and a string of pearls in her hair, the most simply-dressed woman in all that vast assembly. The age of inordinate luxury in dress had begun, and silks and velvets and diamonds, plumes and flowers made a dazzle and confusion of colour in the intense light of the place. It seemed to Pâquerette as if every man in the house wore a star upon his breast, as if every woman had a diamond necklace. The overture was hurrying to the grand crescendo of the close, but she only heard the music as in a dream. That spectacle of the crowded audience absorbed and mastered all her senses. She was nothing but eyes.

Presently the curtain rose, her spirits grew calmer, and her love of music, which was a passion, regained the ascendant. She forgot the diamonds, the loveliness, the sheen and shimmer of velvet and silk in yonder dazzling semicircle, and she concentrated her attention on the stage and the singers. Hector sat behind her, quite in shadow, his arm resting on the back of her chair, his head leaning forward a little, so that his chin almost touched her shoulder, and the perfume of his hair was in her nostrils. They were

as much alone in the great crowded theatre as if they had been in one of the glades of Fontainebleau. Later, in the second act, when the tragic interest of the stage had deepened, when there was a hush in the darkened house, Pâquerette found that they two were sitting hand in hand like acknowledged lovers. She knew not when he had taken her hand in his, but she did not try to withdraw from that firm and fervent clasp. She lifted her eyes to his presently in the half-darkness; and in that meeting of impassioned eyes there was a full confession. Prevarication, denial after that would have been worse than useless. The secret, which had been no secret to him for the last six weeks, was told at once and for ever. From that moment she surrendered herself to the sweetness of her sin. She never pretended to be true to her husband, or to fight the good fight. The little hand lay in his like the pebble in the brook; the mournful eyes looked into his, full of the love which for such weak souls as hers means fatality.

A knock at the box door startled them like a voice from the dead.

‘Who can it be?’ faltered Pâquerette, starting to her feet.

‘Madame Moque, perhaps,’ suggested Hector,

whose nerves were not quite so highly strung as those of his companion.

‘Madame Moque—yes, I had forgotten,’ murmured Pâquerette, as she opened the door.

It was the lively Lisette, bustling, breathless, eager, with powdery complexion and bright black eyes, set off by cheeks of vivid bloom. Her cashmere shawl was plastered across her chest in the last fashionable style, and she made a great display of bonnet strings.

‘You must have wondered what had become of me,’ she exclaimed as she planted herself in front of the box, took her *lorgnette*, and began a general scrutiny of the audience.

‘Is it late?’ Pâquerette asked, innocently.

‘Is it late? Nearly eleven. I thought I should never get away from that *taudis* yonder. The people would have the *Cuisinière* over again, and then they called for *Elle se mouche trop*. I thought I should never get away: There is the Duchesse Vielle-Roche, and the Vicomtesse Lis-Fancé. What a house! And there, yes, it is——’

‘Don’t excite yourself,’ interjected Hector, as Madame Moque squared her elbows and directed her *lorgnette* at a box on the pit tier, as if she had been taking aim with a gun.

‘Zanita!’ exclaimed Madame Moque.

Hector's eyes followed the direction of the *lorgnette*, and Pâquerette looked over his shoulder. He put his arm round her to draw her into the right position for seeing that central box at the bottom of the theatre—a large box, very open, very much *en evidence*—crowded with men whose breasts glittered with orders, like a court in miniature. A woman sat in the midst, lolling back in her chair, fanning herself languidly—a woman of girlish, or even childlike aspect, very fair, very slender, with hair lighter and less golden than the Empress's, arranged loosely, fluffily, above the small head, with diamonds gleaming here and there amidst the feathery pile. This was Zanita—the woman who was said to have graduated in the gutter somewhere by the boulevard de la Chapelle, to have drunk the cup of degradation to the dregs, before she became the rage of Paris.

She, like the Empress, was simply dressed. These great reputations are not sustained by common finery. She wore a white frock, like a schoolgirl's, cut very low upon the milk-white shoulders, revealing the full length of the slim, beautifully-rounded arm; but as she turned suddenly to address one of her court, Pâquerette saw a coruscation of white light flash from her neck like electric fire, and for the first time perceived

that the slender throat was encircled by a diamond necklace which for brilliancy outshone all other gems in the crowded house.

‘What an innocent look the viper has!’ said Hector, when he had gazed his fill.

‘Why do you call her a viper? Is she so very wicked?’ asked Pâquerette, still looking at the slim supple figure—the *petit museau chiffonné* which was hardly to be called beauty, the careless feathery hair, and simple China crape gown.

‘She has slain more people than any assassin who was ever sent to the guillotine or the galleys; she has done more cruel things than St. Arnaud when he roasted the Arabs in a cave; she has ruined more families than any fraudulent banker in England, where they grow that kind of thing to perfection. Fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, have cursed her name. She has peopled the Morgue with its most distinguished lodgers. She is a pestilence—a smiling, sparkling, amusing scourge. If she were to ask me to supper to-night, I should go, and laugh at her jokes, and admire her Sèvres china, and hob and nob with the princes and ambassadors who are her playfellows. I should come away abusing her; but I should go all the same. She is like *absinthe*, which everybody drinks nowadays. She is a vice, and she means

death ; but the vice is a pleasant vice, and nobody counts the cost.'

Pâquerette felt a pang of jealousy as he spoke.

'Promise me that you will never go to her house—never!' she said eagerly, drawing closer to him, claiming him as her own by the pretty vehemence of her air, the look in her eyes, which seemed to say, 'You are mine, and she shall not have you.'

'She is not very likely to ask me,' he answered ; 'and if she were to ask, you have but to say do not go,' he added in a tenderer voice. 'I am your slave from this night. I obey you in all things henceforth. Love has no meaning if it does not mean obedience.'

His voice was so low that only the ears of love could have heard him, but it was loud enough for Pâquerette. Madame Moque was of no consequence, and her head was half out of the box, as she directed her *lorgnette* from group to group, and finally settled down in a deliberate contemplation of the Empress.

And now the quartette began, and Pâquerette thrilled at the sound of those familiar chords.

'Do you remember the night you first heard this?' asked Hector.

She gave a faint sigh, which meant yes.

‘So do I,’ he whispered. ‘I told myself that night we were created for each other. Fate has come between us since then ; but my instinct was true all the same.’

CHAPTER IX.

‘AS A BIRD THAT WANDERETH FROM HER NEST.’

AN offer of supper at the Maison Dorée or the Restaurant Vachette was made, as Lisette had anticipated, but Pâquerette refused, much to her chaperon's vexation.

‘Indeed, I could not eat anything,’ she protested, when Hector pressed the point, suggesting the Passage Jouffroy, if they did not like the full glare of the boulevard, or even the Palais Royal, though that was out of the way; or they might go to Philippe's—the Rocher de Cancale, quietest and most classic of haunts, in his own old neighbourhood, the rue Montorgueil.

Pâquerette thought it was cruel to talk of supper, when her nerves were strung to their utmost tension, when she seemed walking in a new strange world, and upon pavements that were made of air, and had no more idea of ever being hungry or thirsty again than a sylph has.

‘It is the very hour for Tortoni's,’ said Hector,

when he had run the gamut of the restaurants, as best known to *gandin* and Bohemian. 'You shall at least take an ice.'

He led them across the boulevard in the midst of horses and carriages, and they went to an upstairs room at the famous confectioner's, where, forty years before, when Tortoni's was a rendezvous for statesmen and princes, wits and authors, Spolar, the crack billiard player of the first Empire, used to exhibit his skill, to the delight of such men as Talleyrand and Montrond, and where the head waiter, Prévost, wore hair powder, and combined the manners of Versailles and Marly with an equivocal dexterity in the art of giving deficient change.

The windows were open to the balcony, and Pâquerette could see the lights and bustle of the boulevard—carriages pulling up in front of the *perron*, beauty and fashion alighting, with garments blown by the chill March wind. It was a clear spring night—stars shining, moon rising above the house-tops yonder, Paris all alive with the sound of voices, the hurrying to and fro of feet. There was an excitement in the very air men breathed just now, for the rumour of an impending war grew louder every day. The Bourse was in a ferment, and that great question as to the custody

and ownership of the keys of the Holy Places, the subterranean shrines and churches of Bethlehem and Gethsemane, which had long been agitating clerical circles, had taken a new development and meant a great war, in which France and England, the old enemies of Crécy and Waterloo, the hereditary foes of six hundred years, were to fight shoulder to shoulder against the northern foe.

The alliance was popular, the war was popular, and the sons of Gaul were flushed and glad with the prospect of the strife.

Perhaps Paris had never been in better spirits than at this period of her history. Those early years of the second Empire had been a time of golden harvests, of wonderful fortunes, wonderfully and fearfully made. It was a day of speculation, of estates and reputations staked upon the hazards of the Stock Exchange. The demon of chance had set his claw in the hearts of men and women of every class and of every rank. Workmen sold their furniture, wives robbed their husbands, clerks embezzled their employers' money, to stake it at the great national gambling house. They crowded the gates of the temple, they thronged the pavements. From afar even, from quiet townships and villages, the people brought their savings of long years to stake them on the

last new enterprise which promised the highest percentage. Of those who lost their all in this wild game Paris heard very little: for them she shed no tear: but she could point triumphantly to the men who had made their fortunes—men, whose spotless primrose gloves covered hands which had lately known no cover save the pockets of a shabby overcoat. Varnished boots shone upon feet that had but now been slipshod; whitest cuffs were worn by some with whom a shirt was once an uncertainty; overcoats broke out into collars and linings of velvet or satin; and the unknown citizen of yesterday was to-day the patron of the arts, the purchaser of cashmere shawls at ten thousand francs, and dragon jars from the spoils of an Imperial palace.

Napoleon the Third had not disappointed the hopes of those tradesmen of Paris who looked forward to a new empire as a millennium for the upholsterer and the jeweller, the milliner and the coachbuilder. The Emperor did all in his power, both by precept and example, to encourage lavish expenditure. It was his hand which set the ball rolling that has never stopped since then; despite the preaching of moralists, the failure of banks, the ruin of innumerable weaklings tempted by the universal example to an expendi-

ture beyond their means. The expenditure did good in its day: the possessors of these suddenly-acquired fortunes gave a new impetus to art and commerce, stimulated invention, fostered genius. The streets of Paris were glorified by the splendours of the newly rich, the extravagant outlay of men and women to whom it was rapture to wallow in gold, to waste, to spend, to give even, though that pleasure is tamer. Never before were such carriages and horses seen as those which gave life and motion to the scenic beauty of the Champs-Élysées and the Bois de Boulogne, a new creation of park and *parterre* which was gradually being developed from the woodland simplicity of an uncultivated landscape.

The Emperor was keeping pace with the electric eagerness of his subjects. New markets, new boulevards, new bridges were in progress, works of Augustan grandeur. Already the dens and alleys of old Paris were being marked for destruction. Might not this usurper by-and-by paraphrase the boast of the Roman, and say that he had found Paris a city of slums, and that he left her a city of palaces?

Nothing could surpass the success, the popularity of the Imperial rule in those days. It was the honeymoon of France and the Emperor.

The French love a new government, and this empire of wealth and splendour, this government of men in varnished boots, this era of money-making and money-spending, was the very ideal *régime* of the Parisian *bourgeoisie*; and as Paris is France, and as the *bourgeois* is the most important factor in Parisian politics, the Emperor had the nation at his feet.

It was upon this glorified Paris that Pâquerette looked out in the March midnight, between lamplight and starshine. The theatres had disgorged their crowds, the cafés on the boulevard were at their apogee. It was the last hour of harmless idleness, of open, innocent pleasure. A little later and most of those bright façades would be darkened, the crowd would have melted away, and vice and crime, the painted houris, the night prowlers, would have the pavements to themselves, save for the steady footfall of an occasional *sergent-de-ville* tramping on his monotonous beat, like a fine piece of mechanism that could not possibly work wrong.

Pâquerette ate her ice slowly, dreamily, scarcely tasting the delicate flavour of last summer's strawberries, the exotic aroma of crushed vanilla. She was listening to Hector de Valnois' lowered voice, as he stood by her side in the window telling

the old, old story—the tempter’s story, which the serpent whispered to Eve four thousand years ago, and which the ears of all Eve’s daughters absorb to-day as if it were the newest invention in the world.

To Pâquerette the story seemed full of strangeness and wonder. She had been wooed before, she had been won before, wooed honestly, truthfully, soberly, by a good and brave man: won easily because it had been her convenience to be won. Life had been very blank for her when Ishmael offered to share and guard her lot. She had flung herself into his arms, as the bird, scared by the terrors of an unknown world flies back to its cage. But there had been no wild rapture in that wooing, very little passion on either side. Her heart had never been touched as it was touched to-night. She had never before been tempted to surrender conscience, honour, life even, as she was to-night, for the love of the lover who pleaded to her.

Lisette was fond of ices. She ate two of Tortoni’s largest make, and had a glass of maraschino afterwards to prevent the ices doing her any harm. She was so completely occupied by her consumption of this refreshment, and by her observation of the people who were sitting at

the little tables—the women in fashionable gowns, the men in fashionable overcoats and gibus hats, that she took very little notice of those two standing by the window. And they seemed unconscious of her and of all the outside world, or saw it only as a picture—a piece of moving dumb-show passing before their eyes, as they looked down at the boulevard with its long lines of lamps, its glittering cafés and theatres.

‘Zanita is not so beautiful as I expected her to be,’ said Pâquerette by-and-by, after a pause, her thoughts reverting idly to the box on the pit tier, and its little court of men with stars and ribands.

‘Beautiful! Nobody ever called her beautiful,’ answered Hector lightly. ‘She is *chic*; she is the fashion; people talk about her—that is all. They will talk about somebody else next year; and Zanita will be forgotten. It is a short life and a merry one.’

‘And the end may be sad.’

‘The end may be the hospital, or the river, or a brilliant marriage. Such women as Zanita have made great marriages before to-day. Who can fathom the depth of a fool’s folly?’

They went down to the boulevard again

Lisette following them. On the steps of Tortoni’s they brushed against a man of middle age, slender, elegant-looking, with the graceful figure of youth, but with the careworn forehead, faded eyes and iron gray hair and moustache of advanced years.

He recognised Hector with a careless nod, and honoured Pâquerette with a deliberate stare.

‘Who is that?’ asked Pâquerette, as they passed on.

‘A kinsman of mine. Balzac says that in every family there is one member whose existence is the disease of the rest. That man who passed just now is our family malady.’

‘He looks like a gentleman,’ said Pâquerette wonderingly.

‘He is a whited sepulchre. The history of that man is full of dark and secret pages. I never see him without a cold shiver. And now my name has come before the public I don’t suppose he will let me alone very long. He is a man who has always lived upon his fellow-creatures, and no doubt I shall count for something among his resources. I shall have to go up and be taxed.’

It was nearly one o’clock. Pâquerette began to be frightened, and to hurry her footsteps. What would Ishmael say? Hector reassured

her, declaring that her husband would be absorbed by his books and drawings, and would not know the hour. There were no public clocks in that desert region yonder where Pâquerette lived.

‘It is the dullest street in all Paris,’ she said, shuddering. ‘I hate to go back there : it is like going into a tomb.’

Hector walked with them to the end of the street, and there he and Pâquerette parted, with silent pressure of lingering hands, with eyes looking into eyes under the street lamp—a parting which foretold of meetings to come, although no words were spoken. Lisette accompanied her young friend to the apartment on the second floor. If there was to be a quarrel between husband and wife she would be there to shield the offender. She had taken Pâquerette under her wing long ago ; and unhappily she had now taken Hector under her wing also. He pleased her, he dominated her by his poetical looks and patrician air. He belonged to the world which had always been the world of her choice and of her affection : not the world of honest labour and patience in well-doing.

Ishmael had gone to one of his political clubs, and the conclave had lasted until late. He had

not yet returned. There was a little note for Pâquerette on the mantelpiece :

'As you are enjoying yourself at the opera, I shall go to the cercle de Lafayette,' wrote Ishmael. 'There is to be a grand debate to-night, and I daresay I shall be late. Don't wait up for me.'

Pâquerette breathed more freely. She dreaded the sight of her husband's face. It was a relief to stave off the evil hour of their meeting.

If she could have told him the truth—that she had long ceased to love him—that she had given the strongest feelings of which her heart and brain were capable to another ! Unhappily, candour is not easy in a case of this kind. The burden of sin might be lessened, perhaps, by some hard and bitter truths ; but hand in hand with the dark shade of sin travels the shadow called shame ; and they two must creep on together by obscure passages, by loathsome lanes and foulest winding ways, rather than face the broad light of day. Almost for the first time since her baby's death Pâquerette lay down to rest without saying her prayers, and without looking at the distant graveyard where the little one lay.

Ishmael went his way through the bright days

of April and May, the balmier time of June, untroubled by any doubt of his wife's loyalty, or by any apprehension of her danger. He was not a careless husband, but he was a husband whose life was so full of work, and of all-absorbing interests connected with that work, as to leave no margin for morbid fancies or jealous fears. He loved his wife as much as he had ever yet loved woman, though not, perhaps, so fondly as he had loved those baby brothers of his. After his fashion, he was honestly and faithfully attached to her. She had not touched his deepest feelings—she had not entered that holy of holies in the heart of man which opens to receive but one image in a lifetime. The altar in that sanctuary was still empty, the lamp unlighted. She had moved him to pity her; she had made him fond of her, proud even of her graceful prettiness, the growing refinement of her thoughts and ways. But she had not gone further than this. She had not made herself the sharer of his hopes and dreams, the chosen companion of his life. Her society was not all the world to him—not all-sufficient company for mind as well as heart. He had hoped at first that she would become all this, that she would learn to be interested in all that was vital to his success; but he found after a little while that it was not in her nature to care

intensely for anything outside the narrow circle of her own small interests and frivolous pleasures. Her piano was more to her than all the lifeblood in all the hearts of Paris. A new song moved her more than the mightiest convulsions that stirred her country. This talk of an impending war in the East, for instance—a war which, however victorious for France, must inevitably swallow up thousands of French soldiers in a great gulf of blood and fire—hardly moved her with one thrill of fear or grief. She could not realise the pain and loss of others, outside the little space which was her world.

‘You will not have to fight, will you?’ she asked her husband with a touch of anxiety.

‘No, love. I had a lucky number drawn for me two years ago at Rennes, and I am exempt. A good priest I know looked after the business.’

That was all she cared to know. The cannon might thunder: France and the foe might roll in the dust, destroying and destroyed: so long as the horror and the terror of it all came not across her path.

This little rift within the lute, this lack of sympathy between husband and wife had gradually widened to a great gulf. Ishmael had come to regard his pretty young wife as the ornament of

his domestic existence—a something to be cherished and cared for, to be kept beautiful and neat, but not as the half of his life. If he were worried he told Pâquerette nothing of his trouble ; if he were flushed with some new idea, some improvement or invention which might bring him gain and fame in the future, he did not ask her to share his hopes. He had tried to interest her in his work, to explain the beauties of the mechanical arts, but she had not even tried to understand him. She had shrugged her shoulders, and turned away from his diagrams with disgust. Why could he not draw caricatures after Gavarni — soldiers, battle-scenes, after Meissonier, as Hector de Valnois did, instead of those everlasting wheels, and angles, and numerals, which he was for ever jotting with his clumsy pencil ?

Refused all sympathy where it would have pleased him best to find it, Ishmael became daily more devoted to his work and his studies. That thirst for knowledge which had been an instinct with him as a little child on board the steamer—when he wanted to know why the engine did this or that, and what made the waves rise and fall, and why the sun was red in the evening—was still a part of his nature. Like that heaven-born mathematician, Clerk Maxwell—who used to question his

mother about everything he saw, ‘What is the go of it?’ ‘Yes,’ when inadequately enlightened, ‘but what’s the particular go of it?’—Ishmael wanted to learn the ‘particular go’ of everything which he had to do; and he had, by reason of this eager curiosity, advanced from the rudimentary labours of a simple *gâcheur* to a very considerable mastery of the mechanical arts as involved in the trade of a builder and contractor. Nor had he narrowed his mind within the circle of his own interests. His evening recreations, always of an intellectual kind, took him among circles where all things in heaven and earth were discussed with the fever of youth and enthusiasm. His clubs were democratic clubs; for albeit proscription had thinned the ranks of republicanism, and the shining lights were for the most part languishing in the purlieus of Leicester Square, and wasting their eloquence in the restaurants of Rupert Street and Castle Street, there were thinkers and talkers among the Reds still left in Paris, dreamers who cherished the old impossible dream of a France self-governed, a democracy of all the talents. Strange for those who have survived until to-day to discover that a Republic is ever so much more costly an institution than even an Empire, and that nepotism and place-hunting, and bloated sinecurists, and cats that catch no mice,

can thrive as well under the flag of the people as under golden eagles and an Imperial master.

All young men are radicals at heart, and Ishmael had a sneaking fondness for the Reds in these early years of the Empire, albeit he could see that the new master of France was doing great things for the country, most of all in the building line, and was a man to be respected as a hard-working and intelligent ruler, and not a king of Yvetôt.

Ishmael read all the republican authors—Hugo, Schoelcher, Lammenais, Eugène Sue. He read the papers of all colours, and could survey the political horizon from more than one standpoint; and as he read and investigated, his faith in the Empire grew stronger, and he began to speak in his club on the side of established power, and to be known as an Imperialist. He saw great works inaugurated, houses built for the labouring classes, hospitals, charitable institutions of all kinds arising in the outskirts of Paris. He saw the city prosperous, beloved of the world, a place to which the strange nations flocked, bringing their gold as tribute. If there were rottenness under this seeming prosperity Ishmael had not found it out.

The summer wore on, the allied armies were marching upon Varna, and the Russians, after terrible repulses and losses, had raised the siege

of Silistria. War news was eagerly waited for in Paris; but of that fatal expedition to the marshes and deserts of the Dobrutja, which cost France so many of her bravest soldiers, the Parisians were told very little in those days. It is only long after a war, in the journals of doctors and newspaper men, that the dark story of disease and famine, the shameful details of mismanagement and neglect, become known to the world.

There was trouble nearer home than in the swamps washed by the Danube. The pestilence which raged in those Roumanian deserts, in the tainted atmosphere of Varna, was doing its deadly work in France and in England. This year of plentiful harvests and overflowing barns, prosperous vineyards and luxuriant hop-gardens, was also a year of death. While the golden grain ripened, and the grape purpled under the summer sun, while the husbandman shouldered his sickle and trudged through dewy fields to his harvesting, that other Reaper, whose crop never fails, rested neither by day nor night, and *his* barns, too, were overflowing, and his garnerers were full. That year of 1854 was one of those terrible seasons which are remembered as cholera years. A cloud of death hung over the crowded slums of Paris and London. The black flag hung at the entrances of streets and alleys,

warning the stranger of his peril. It was a dreadful time; and yet the daily work of men and women went on, houses were built as well as coffins, the clink of the hammer sounded cheerily on the new boulevards and in the new markets, and there were merrymakings and holidays, and the ribald jesters who make light of heaven and hell cried, as of old, '*A ta santé, Morbus!*' as they tossed off their *cogne* or their *pétrole* at the wine-shops on the road to the overcrowded cemetery, where the gorged earth refused to perform its office of purification, and the reeking field was one foul mass of corruption and decay.

Ishmael laughed to scorn all danger for himself, but he was full of care for Pâquerette. He looked at her anxiously every evening when he came from his work, took her little hands in his, and drew her towards him in the full light of the window, to see if there were any sign of the spoiler in that delicate face. But Death, the Spoiler, had set no mark upon Pâquerette's beauty. There was a worse enemy at work: and Ishmael saw no sign of that greater evil.

Never had Pâquerette looked prettier than in these August evenings. She knew how to set off her beauty to the utmost advantage; she had acquired the art of dress to the highest perfection

compatible with small means. She followed the fashions with an admirable dexterity which imparted to cheap cashmere and a straw bonnet all the grace and style of famous milliners in the court quarter. And there was a new brightness in her manner that heightened her delicate prettiness—a light in her eyes, a flush upon her cheek, a faintly tremulous look in the half-parted lips which recalled the image of a bird poising itself on quivering wings before flashing into sudden flight. Ishmael remembered just such a look in her face that day at Vincennes, when, almost strangers to each other, he held her in his arms as they waltzed to the music of the cracked old organ on the scanty trampled greensward.

Ishmael was nervous about his wife's comings and goings at this time of pestilence. He questioned her more closely than of old as to where she went, warned her against infected neighbourhoods. They were only too near the fever-dens of that terrible Passage Ménilmontant, with its double range of low houses, black with the grime of centuries; its blind windows, and dark and filthy entrances which look like the openings of caverns; its population of rag-pickers, sewer men, dealers in broken glass; its foul odours from gutter and muck-heap, mixed with the reek of

coarsest viands; its low-browed murderous wine-shops, where bottles and knives play their part in many a midnight brawl, and where in the gray light of next morning the patron wipes the stains from tables where the red splashes are as often of blood as of wine. Here the cholera-fiend might be supposed to find congenial quarters, to hold high revel in a nest that had been prepared for his coming.

Ishmael entreated Pâquerette to avoid all such neighbourhoods; to take the broad airy highways when she went for her walks; to be careful what shops she entered; in a word, to go about as little as possible.

‘If I were to take your advice I should make myself ill by staying at home,’ she answered fretfully one morning, when he was particularly urgent in his lecture. ‘I should get the cholera merely from brooding upon it. Monsieur Vielbois told me there was nothing so bad as fear and low spirits. You need not be afraid that I shall go for a walk in the passage Ménilmontant: it is quite bad enough to live within a quarter of a mile of that detestable place. I seldom go anywhere, except to Madame Moque’s, and I generally do all my marketing with her.’

‘I am glad of that,’ said Ishmael. ‘Lisette is a clever woman, and she won’t lead you into danger. Oh! by the bye, you have given me so many *charcuterie* dinners of late. You know I am not particular what I eat, but one gets tired of that kind of thing day after day—a perpetual flavour of garlic and sage, or that faint taste of stale truffles; and when a man has to be about all day using his arms and legs, a more nourishing diet is better.’

‘I thought you liked me to deal with the Moques,’ retorted his wife sullenly.

Forgetfulness and indifference had been growing upon her of late in regard to all domestic affairs. She thought more of a pair of new gloves or bonnet strings than of her husband’s dinner; and just at the last, as she was hurrying home from a day in fairer scenes, she would look in at Moque’s *en passant*, and ask him to send something—anything—for dinner at once; and in this manner Ishmael had been made to consume a good deal of the *rebut* of the charcutier’s shop.

‘Yes, I like you to deal there for anything we really want,’ answered Ishmael quietly. He was not the man to lose his temper for such a detail as a bad dinner seven days a week. ‘But we need not live all the year round upon cold pig

to oblige Lisette's husband. Beef and mutton are an agreeable variety, and a good deal more wholesome. Let us have beef and mutton in future, my pet.'

'That means that I am to be at home all the afternoon to cook the dinner,' said Pâquerette petulantly.

'Surely a *pot-au-feu* is not such a troublesome business as that! Why, what a little gadabout you have grown!'

Pâquerette crimsoned and looked down.

'My life is so dull in this dreary room,' she said, 'with those intolerable sphinxes staring at me all day long.'

'You have your piano, dear.'

'If I hadn't I should go mad. I tell you it does me good to get into the air. You are out all day. Why should I be cooped up within four walls?'

'There is some difference,' answered Ishmael, gravely. 'I have to go out to work for our daily bread, while you have only the home to think about.'

'If I were not to go out now and then home would be as bad as St. Lazare,' retorted Pâquerette petulantly. 'I would rather be back in the rue Sombreuil, where I could sit in the yard

all day. At least I could see a little bit of sky overhead, and hear voices from twenty open windows, and see faces and people coming and going. This house is like a tomb.'

'It is something to be in a respectable house where there are only honest people,' answered Ishmael, feeling nearer anger than he had ever yet felt with Pâquerette. 'I don't think you ought to complain of the dulness of your life. Of late you have gone to a theatre or a concert two or three times a week. I wonder Lisette can so often get away from the Cristal.'

'They are tired of her at the Cristal,' said Pâquerette, shortly. 'They want newer faces, younger singers. If you would only have let me sing my little *patois* songs at the Cristal I should have been able to earn forty or fifty francs a week, and then *you* would not be the only person to earn our daily bread.'

These last words were spoken with a sneer, the token of irritated nerves. Pâquerette kept glancing at the solemn black-faced clock between the bronze sphinxes. Her husband had come home to breakfast, and was returning to his work later than usual. She expected a letter, a letter which must not be delivered while Ishmael was there, and she was in agonies.

‘My child, how pale you are!’ cried her husband, pausing with *casquette* in hand. ‘I’m afraid you are ill.’

‘No, no; only a little nervous. You worry me so with all that solemn talk about nothing. There, there! don’t be late for your work. You shall have beef for your dinner, as much as you can eat—beef *par dessus la tête*; and I will not make my *début* at the Palais de Cristal: that is all past and done with.’

‘My pet, can you wonder that I refused to let you appear before that rabble yonder? You, my wife, with bare arms and shoulders, and a painted face, like the rest of them! The very thought of it fills me with horror.’

‘I might have appeared at the opera and made a mad success—like Bosio, perhaps, but for you,’ she said gloomily. ‘It is hard when God has given one talent to be obliged to hide one’s light under a bushel.’

‘My dear, the time may come when your light will not be so hidden,’ answered Ishmael with infinite patience. ‘I may be a rich man some day; and then you can sing to an audience whose praise will be worth having, without appearing on a public stage.’

“‘May be,’ and ‘some day,’” mocked Pâquerette.

‘I have heard those words before. The grandfather used to say he would be rich some day.’

Ishmael stooped to kiss her reluctant lips, and went his way without another word. What good is there in arguing with a spoilt child crossed in its fancy?

When he went home that evening Pâquerette was absent as usual, but there was a large piece of beef simmering in the *pot-au-feu*, from which rose a goodly odour of vegetable soup, and the cloth was laid neatly with a solitary cover.

Beside the wine bottle there lay a letter, in Father Bressant’s quaint, cramped hand—a brief letter, but to the purpose, and quite long enough to spoil Ishmael’s dinner.

‘Go at once to Pen Hoël,’ wrote the priest. ‘The pestilence has been busy in our poor village, and there has been great trouble at the château. Lose no time, if you would see your father alive. If I am spared I shall meet you there.’

Ishmael wrote a line to Pâquerette telling her that he was going to Brittany to see a relative dangerously ill. He left her money enough to last for a fortnight, but hoped to be back with her in a week. He promised to write as soon as he arrived at his destination; urged her to keep up her spirits and take care of her health. She

could stay with Madame Moque during his absence, if she felt dull or nervous alone.

He left his dinner untasted. On his way out he locked into the neat little shop where Madame Morice sold her groceries, her chocolate *à la vanille*, *pâte d'Italie*, burnt onions for gravies, and little bottles of mushrooms and anchovies in oil, the refinements of the grocer's trade, which had but a small sale in that neighbourhood, only the Morices were a prudent and a frugal couple, neither gave nor took credit, lived upon little, and contrived to make a small business profitable.

'I am called away, into the country by illness,' said Ishmael hurriedly. 'If you can look after my wife a little in my absence, *chère dame*, I shall take it as a favour. She may mope while I am gone, poor child!'

'I do not think Madame will mope very much,' answered the *bourgeoise*, with a curious shrug of her shoulders; 'but I will do what I can—for your sake.'

CHAPTER X.

‘ AS MESSENGERS OF DEATH.’

THE rail carried Ishmael to Chartres between night-fall and morning. He started for Alençon on the *banquette* of a diligence in the gray light of a September dawn, with a cold wind creeping over the house-tops and along the empty streets. From Alençon another diligence took him to Fougères. On alighting at the inn where the diligence stopped, he found the only person astir was a sleepy waiter in a *salle à manger* redolent of the fumes of last night's wine and last night's tobacco, blended with faint fetid odours left by the dinners of the last week. This person informed him that the diligence for Pontorson did not start till two o'clock in the afternoon; so after some difficulty he negotiated the hire of a horse, for which he left nearly all the contents of his pocket-book by way of deposit. Mounted on this unknown brute, which behaved after the manner of Normandy horses for the first two or three miles, he left

the antique town, with its picturesque castle and mediæval towers, and rode at a steady six miles an hour towards the boundary line of Brittany. How strange, and yet how familiar the landscape seemed to him!—the long straight road, now ascending and now descending by many a gentle undulation, and by some steepish hills; the quiet fields, so dim and gray, and unreal under the morning mists. The tall poplars, the luxuriant hedgerows, the narrow streams. How different from that stony wilderness in which he had lived for the last three years, amidst the ceaseless din of voices, the everlasting tread of multitudinous feet! What a feeling of peace in the air! What a holy stillness, broken only by the cry of the corncrake, or the croaking of frogs in a marshy corner under the alder hedge yonder. The old scenes, the old atmosphere, brought back the memory of old stories, old superstitions, which he had heard told again and again beside the wide chimney place in the kitchen at Pen Hoël, where the little hunch-backed, sandy-haired tailor, employed on the premises to make liveries for the coachman and footman, was received into the friendly circle after supper, and made much of, for the sake of his inexhaustible fund of anecdote and legend. From the tailor's pallid lips, or from the wandering

Pillawer, admitted to the kitchen hearth for an evening and lodged in a stable or a barn for the night after, Ishmael had learnt all that he knew of his native province. From these he had heard many an awful story of shipwreck, and of the old prayer of the sailor, 'Lord, save us! our boat is so small and Thy sea is so big;' of the hurricane which is never lulled till the waves have cast up the corpses of heretics and all other evil creatures; of the ghostly multitude of the drowned whose phantom forms show white upon the crests of the waves on the Day of the Dead; of the spirit-voices, piteous, lamenting, which fill the Bay of the Departed with a sound of wailing.

Here, too, he had heard of the strange-looking men clothed in white raiment, black-bearded, carrying staves, and with sacks upon their shoulders, who used to be seen after night-fall on the lonely roads between Châteaulin and Quimper—men of dark and fatal aspect. The Custom House officers will tell you that these are smugglers; but do not believe them. They are demons, who prowl around the abodes of the dying, waiting to carry off the souls of the dead; and if the good angel of the dying is not quick enough, the helpless souls are bundled into the

demon's bag and carried off to the marshes of Saint Michel, where they lie hidden in holes and foul places, till they are set free by mass and prayer. Those dismal marshes are peopled with souls in pain ; and if you pass that way at night you will hear the cry of their anguish mixed with the wailing of the wind among the reeds.

Beside that evening fire he had heard of the wreckers of old, and how, like their opposite neighbours on the Cornish coast, they lighted bonfires to beguile the helpless mariners ashore ; or how they would tie a lantern to the horns of a bull, twisting the rope round one of his fore legs, so that at every step the animal lowered or lifted his head, with a swaying motion of the lantern, which made it look from afar like the light of a ship at sea, thus luring the unwary sailor on to the rocks. Very fixed was the belief of the Breton of those days that all which the sea cast up on his shore was his rightful property.

Here, too, Ishmael had heard of gnomes and fairies, benevolent or malicious ; of the earth-men, husbands of the fairies, the *poulpicans*, the Breton Robin Goodfellows, who ring their fairy bells in the woods to deceive the poor little shepherd lads in quest of their lost goats, who run after the girls who go home too late from night-watch or

Pardon. Here he had listened to wonderful legends of the city of Ys swallowed up by the sea: you may see the stones of her ancient altars at low tide, fifteen or twenty feet beneath the clear water.

Strange to come back from Paris, the city where people believed in so little, to this quiet country where they believed so much; where the humble village priest, a son of the soil, born of peasant parents, reared at the tail of the plough, was a power and an influence; where the *fleur de lys* was still a sacred symbol, and the flag of republicanism was a rag striped with blood; where the memory of the Chouans with their screech-owl cry was still fresh in the minds of the people, and the stories of atrocities committed on one side by the hated Blues—the soldiers of the republic—on the other by the sons of the soil, were still told by the winter fire.

Yes; it was a backward and ignorant land, a land of old superstitions, old creeds, old loyalties; but, whatever it was, Ishmael loved every rood of its green fields, every tree, and every hedge-flower. He had been happy in the great city, full of work in the present, full of hope for the future; but he had no love for that stony wilderness. He thought of Paris as an embodied indifference to

man and his sufferings—cold, inaccessible, inhuman. You might starve or rot in her alleys, and she would care nothing. You might drown yourself in her river: you might languish in her prisons. You might steep yourself in those foul vices which seemed an element of her atmosphere: and she would care not one jot for your agony, your despair, your ruin of soul and body, your untimely death. The best she would give you would be a free funeral.

But here, in these country roads, among these pleasant meadows, it seemed to him as if all nature thrilled with sympathy. The animals came to the field gates and looked at him gravely with eyes full of friendliness. The birds in the hedgerows chirped and twittered for him. The soft motion of leafy boughs had a kind of language; and the clouds sailing above his head had a meaning here which they never had in Paris, where he rarely lifted his eyes skyward.

He was full of anxiety about his father, whom he might never again see alive—the letter seemed to mean as much as that; and yet the very atmosphere of his native land comforted him. He thought of his young brothers, and what delight it would be to clasp them to his breast, to see the bright young faces, to feel the touch

of those loving lips. Would they have forgotten him in four years?—half a lifetime for the younger of the two, who would be only seven now. This was a question which troubled him sorely. It would be such a blow to find himself forgotten. Of the heritage that he had renounced, or of his father's injustice in exacting such a sacrifice from him, he thought not at all. He cared nothing for money in the abstract; and he had a conviction that he was going to be rich some day. Of all the schemes that he had ready for development when the chance arose, some one would prove a mine of gold. He had heard many histories of men who had made fortunes, beginning with nothing, and he knew that he was on the right track.

It was a long ride to Pontorson, and he had to rest and refresh his horse on the way. He left the animal at the inn near the bridge, thinking to save time by walking the seven miles that lay between him and his destination, rather than by waiting to rest the horse. Three o'clock was striking as he crossed the bridge; and now he was really in his own province, his foot upon his native soil. The hedgerows and fields he had seen hitherto were Norman hedgerows and fields. There was very little difference between the two

provinces, so far ; but to Ishmael it seemed as if the soil had another look, as if the orchards were more fertile, the cottages more homely after he had crossed the river.

He walked at a swinging pace, more eager, more anxious as he drew nearer home. At Pontorson they had told him terrible things of the cholera. The hand of God had been heavy upon the little town, they said ; for whereas in Paris in the time of pestilence the people were always inclined to suspect some human infamy working evil—the Government poisoning the wells, or something equally diabolical—the simple rustic recognised only the chastisement of an offended Heaven.

‘Have there been no precautions taken?’ asked Ishmael of the priest who told him how the funeral bell had been sounding daily, as in the awful year of ’32, when a vision of gigantic women in red garments had been seen at Brest, just before the coming of the pestilence, blowing the blast of death across the valleys.

The priest pointed to half-a-dozen open graves dug in advance. *This* was how they had prepared for the scourge. A sombre sense of fatality possessed their souls. ‘God has given us over to the demon,’ they said. The gorged graveyard

was a focus of infection in the midst of each settlement; but the idea of carrying away their dead to a distant cemetery, banishing the departed from the family grave, from the bones of dead and gone ancestors, from the sound of the voices of the living, from the lights of the village, was repelled as a kind of sacrilege.

Just outside a little *bourg* Ishmael met a farmer's cart, with a woman sitting on the shaft, and a man walking at the horse's head. The horse was smart with his collar of blue sheepskin, and his tasselled bridle. He had a branch of Spanish chestnut tied upon his head to keep off the flies, and was decked with bells which tinkled gaily as he went along. But the faces of the man and woman were full of gloom. A little procession in black raiment walked behind the cart; and in the cart, wrapped in their winding-sheets, lay the corpses of two children on a bed of purple clover, fresh flowers and foliage scattered above them. The plague had been busy in the villages and farms, and there had been no time to make coffins for all the dead. These were to be laid in the cool dark earth of their grandfather's grave.

The sight of that melancholy train filled Ishmael with a sudden horror. His brothers!

Had they escaped the pestilence? He had thought of them till this moment as the embodiment of health and vigour. It had not occurred to him that they could be ill. But the look of white despair in the mother's face, the father's gloomy brow, and those young forms lying side-by-side amidst the clover and the leafage, seemed like a presage of evil. Were things as bad as this in the neighbourhood of Pen Hoël? And how could he be sure his brothers were not in peril?

He took out Father Bressant's letter and re-read it hastily. There had been trouble at the château. That trouble he had taken heretofore to mean his father's illness; but it seemed to him now that the trouble was a thing apart—a something which had preceded his father's malady. He was almost within sight of the village in the hollow, he was on the very spot where he had parted from the good priest four years ago: yes, just on this crest of the hill he had turned to watch the vanishing figure of his one faithful friend. He was so near, yet all in a moment he was stricken with the sudden sickness of a great fear; and it seemed to him as if his feet refused to carry him any further. He felt as if he must sink down upon a bank and lie there helpless,

inert, till chance brought someone by who could tell him what had happened at the château, could assure him that his brothers were alive and well. Then and then only could he have strength to go the rest of the way.

He sat down for a few minutes, wiped the cold dew from his forehead, and nerved himself to finish his journey. Why should the death of those peasant children so alarm him? Neglected, poorly fed, badly lodged, they were an easy prey for the destroyer. But his darlings were lodged luxuriously, cared for tenderly, watched by day and night. Why should he fear for them? What shelter could be a safer stronghold from pestilence and death than the old home of his forefathers, which had never been polluted by the occupation of strange races? Clever as he was in the constructive arts he had not yet been awakened to the broad questions of sanitation; and he did not know that these good old family mansions are often dens of fever and sinks of hidden pollution.

He quickened his pace for that final mile, and he was a little breathed when he stood before the door of Father Bressant's presbytery, which was not much superior to the neighbouring cottages, while the habits of the priest were

even less luxurious than those of his humblest parishioners.

The door stood open to air and sunlight, the little parlour had its old orderly peaceful look, furnished with a fine old cherrywood press with brass mounts, a ponderous walnutwood writing-table, and three or four century-old chairs, an inheritance from a peasant ancestry. A *secrétaire* in a corner displayed a couple of shelves of books, a collection which, small and shabby as it might be, gave a learned air to the room, while upon the high mantle-shelf a few pieces of Rouen pottery and a handsome pair of brass candlesticks made an improvement upon the usual village decoration of saucepan-lids and flat-irons. The room was empty, but on the priest's desk there lay a letter directed to Monsieur Sébastien Caradec.

'Go at once to the château. No time to be lost.'

That was the whole of the letter. The stroke of the death-bell startled Ishmael as he read the priest's injunction.

He skirted the churchyard as he went up the hill to Pen Hoël. There was no one to be seen in the little cemetery. Ishmael saw an open grave near the tower from which that dismal reverberation of the bell pealed out at solemn intervals like a

minute gun. An old man was pulling the rope just inside the doorway of the tower. Ishmael's first impulse was to stop and question this ancient sexton; but remembering that the man was stone deaf and painfully slow of apprehension even when he heard, he hurried on. The cupola of the château was visible above the crest of the wooded slope. Ishmael's feet were familiar with every possible and impossible approach to the place of his birth, and he went straight as the crow flies, making a line through the underwood, athwart the great boles of the chestnuts and oaks, until he leapt upon the low balustrade of the terrace and stood in front of the long range of windows, curtained just as of old, with the same air of a house in which everybody has gone to sleep. No, not quite the same as of old. He started back at the sight of the doorway draped with black, solemn funereal velvet, sprinkled with silver notes of admiration, which were meant to represent tears. The funeral bell boomed and vibrated in the green hollow yonder, and from the shadowy doorway there came a slow and solemn train. A coffin heaped with flowers was borne into the light, and then came the priest in his robes, and his acolytes in their white surplices. Two gentlemen followed, in deep mourning,

and with dismal countenances, then three of the old servants whom Ishmael remembered, and this was all.

He stood aside while the funeral procession passed along the terrace and went slowly down the drive. Neither priest nor mourners had looked at Ishmael. He went into the house, and upstairs to his father's room, without meeting a mortal.

Outside the door of that well-remembered chamber he came to a dead stop. How often he had entered that room in days gone by to be lectured, reproved, threatened; hardly ever to receive word or token of affection. And now it was perhaps the chamber of death, and he would enter it like Esau, robbed in advance of his birthright. For the portion he had surrendered he cared nothing: but there was a touch of bitterness in the thought of how the surrender had been exacted from him.

He knocked softly, but there was no answer: and then he opened the door quietly and went in. The room he thus entered was his father's study and favourite sitting-room. Monsieur's bedroom opened out of it on one side, Madame's on the other, with her boudoir and dressing-room beyond.

The study was empty, and Ishmael went

through to his father's bedroom. A sister of charity was asleep in an arm-chair by the window. The bed was in an alcove, heavily draped, remote from the light; and in the deep shadow Monsieur Caradec's face had the leaden pallor of death. As Ishmael approached with noiseless footfall the father's eyes opened and looked at his son.

‘Sébastien!’ he muttered; ‘then there is some one of my blood living still.’

‘My brothers!’ gasped Ishmael, frozen by that speech, unable to contain himself.

‘You have no brothers; they were laid in their graves a week ago. Their mother followed them just now. You must have met the funeral.’

‘Yes.’

Ishmael fell on his knees by the bedside, buried his head in the coverlet and sobbed aloud.

The Sister opened her eyes, saw that kneeling figure, understood in a moment, and stole quietly from the room, leaving father and son together.

‘What can you care for their death?’ said his father bitterly. ‘You abandoned your home and your kindred, renounced your name. You were always at heart an alien.’

‘Who made me an alien, father?’ asked the

young man, lifting up his head and wiping away those blinding tears. 'My home was less than a home, my kindred were not like kindred—except those dear little children: they loved me and I loved them truly, dearly, with all my heart, looking forward with hope to a day when we should be brothers again, and know each other and love each other again.'

'Broken links are not so easily reunited,' said the Count quietly. 'Your brothers were stricken by cholera last week. First one drooped and fell, then the other. Within four days from the first note of alarm both were dead. Their mother was in a state of hysteria from the hour her elder boy was stricken, and two days after the double funeral the scourge took hold of her. It is in the very air we breathe. The earth we tread upon reeks with poison; it hangs in the heavy mists of evening and morning, and clings to the sodden leaves of the trees. It is everywhere—in ditches, wells, marshes, copses, cottage-gardens. The poor have been dying like rotten sheep. If I have escaped it is because the hand of death was on me already. The grief and agony of the last fortnight have only hastened my end. You should not have come here, Sébastien. You are coming into the jaws of death.'

'I am not afraid of death. The cholera is raging in Paris too. Father Bressant wrote to tell me that you were ill. But you have been ill a long time it seems. He ought to have written to me sooner.'

Everything in the invalid's appearance told of a lingering malady, a slow decay. The stroke of the pestilence was not here. The gradual wearing out of a joyless life—disappointment, vain regret, carking care—these were the foes that had sapped the citadel.

'I have been ailing for a long time,' answered Monsieur Caradec, 'but have not been dangerously ill. Father Bressant teased me for permission to write to you some months ago, but I forbade him. I told him that you had taken your own road in life, and that all links between us were broken. But he wrote to you after all, it seems. And you have come—come to see me die.'

He spoke slowly and with evident effort. A short hard cough stopped his utterance every now and then, and Ishmael saw that the white cambric handkerchief was stained with blood. The Count's lungs had been affected for a long time. He had been a broken man for the last two years, crawling about in the sunshine, sympathising with his wife's hypochondriac

fancies, trying every new remedy, every variety of treatment, his chief conversation about doctors and doctor's stuff. The shock of his children's death had stricken him down, and a fit of weeping had brought on a violent hæmorrhage which threatened immediate death. He had been kept alive since that attack by devoted nursing, had lived to see his wife stricken by the dire disease which was abroad in the land, and to see the windows darkened for her funeral.

But the doctors gave no hope of his recovery. He would never leave his room alive. Life was a question of so many days, or so many hours more or less.

He looked at his eldest son with eyes in which there was no love. He felt no comfort in the presence of this last of his race. He could only remember those two whom he had loved, those sons with whose existence there was no association of shame, no memory that meant agony, as of that nameless grave at Montmartre. He did not say that he was glad to see Ishmael. He tolerated his presence, and that was all.

The Nursing-sister came back presently, and administered to her patient. All appetite had gone, but there was a prescribed administration of nourishment, stimulants, medicine, regulated by

the clock—a pain and a weariness to the victim who longed to shuffle off the last of life's burdens. But he [submitted to the Sister's troublesome routine, as a good Christian who felt that his life was not in his own hands. His rosary—an old carved ivory rosary that had been his mother's—lay on the coverlet beside his wasted hand, and every now and then his thin fingers closed upon the yellow beads and his white lips shaped a prayer.

The last stroke of the funeral bell had died away in the valley, the Sister had thrown back the venetian shutters, and the soft evening light filled the room. There had been but little sunshine since the blazing noontides of August—the glorious harvest-time. A dull heavy sky had brooded over the land, dense mists had hidden the sun, not a breath of wind had stirred the woodland. It seemed as if the poison that reeked from the too fertile earth, a land rich with corruption, had found no escape in the air. Men longed for a hurricane to sweep that infection seaward, and for a flood to wash the tainted ground.

Raymond Caradec had been sleeping uneasily for more than an hour. He opened his eyes and looked up presently with a startled air, and saw his son looking at him in the calm evening light.

‘Who is that?’ he asked the Sister, pointing to Ishmael as he spoke.

‘It is Monsieur Sébastien, sir, your eldest son.’

The dying man heard without seeming to understand. His mind wandered sometimes in the night, was not always clear immediately after slumber: but he had a look in his eyes just now which the Sister had not seen before in him. She had seen that look often enough in other faces, and the dull ashen hue of the skin, deepening to purple about the lips. A host of summer flies came suddenly in at the window while she looked, and surrounded the sick man’s head like a cloud of incense. Father Bressant appeared in the doorway just at this moment, and the Priest and the Sister exchanged glances of sad significance. In their country, this cloud of flies hovering over a sick-bed was deemed a fatal omen.

Raymond Caradec looked at his son with a strange intensity in the dim glazing eyes. He stretched out his thin hand, he gave a faint half articulate cry of gladness.

‘Lucien,’ he murmured, ‘pardon! Yes, you smile, you look kindly at me—Lucien—friend—brother! Forgiven!’

And with that fading gaze fixed on his son's face, his arms crept slowly down the length of the coverlet, his wasted fingers clutched the silken folds tightly, convulsively, for an instant: and then there came a faint gasping sigh, the bent fingers relaxed and hung loose, the iron-gray head rolled back among the pillows.

Deluded by the dimness of dying eyes, his thoughts travelling back to the far-away time of his youth, Raymond Caradec had mistaken his son's face for the face of his false friend, the friend who had fallen by his sword two and twenty years before on the sands at Bourbon.

CHAPTER XI.

‘SCATTERED TOWARD ALL WINDS.’

ISHMAEL went straight from his father's death-bed to that new mound in the churchyard, beneath which his young brothers were lying. He knelt, and prayed, and wept, beside that grave, until the moon was high above the wooded ridge behind the château, shining silvery yonder on the far away reach of barren sands and the distant waters of the bay. It was past eleven when he went to the presbytery where he had arranged to spend the night, rather than at the château, where four tall wax tapers were burning in the chamber of death, and where a little old notary from Pontorson was busy setting the seal of authority upon *secrétaires* and drawers, while the Priest and the black-robed Sister knelt and prayed beside the shrouded alcove.

Ishmael's first idea had been to start on his return journey at daybreak, walking to Pontorson,

and there remounting the horse he had hired at Fougères. But Father Bressant urged the necessity of his remaining to attend his father’s funeral, and to assert himself as his father’s sole heir.

‘All belongs to you now,’ he said: ‘the portion which you renounced and the portion that would have gone to your brothers.’

‘If it were a thousand times as much, I would renounce it over again to have my brothers,’ said Ishmael sadly. ‘As for my father’s funeral—well, I suppose I ought to be present, that it is a mark of reverence which I owe to the dead—to the dead to whom I was so much less than a son, an alien always, an outcast always.’

He spent a sleepless night in the neat little cottage bedchamber, with its tiled floor and snow-white linen, and perfume of late roses blowing in at the open lattice; and he was astir early—in the churchyard again, and then at the château, where he heard that the funeral was to take place on the following afternoon. Monsieur Lanion, Madame Caradec’s brother-in-law, who had come to attend her funeral, had gone back to the inn at Pontorson, to return to-morrow on the same melancholy errand, and with a faint hope that his wife might be left some small legacy. She would

in any case succeed to her sister's *dot*, which had been so settled as to return to Madame Caradec's own family in the event of her dying childless.

Ishmael wandered about the empty rooms, desolate for evermore as it seemed to him; since his mind could not realise the idea of any other inhabitants than those whom he remembered in that familiar place. In the *salon* all things remained as Madame Caradec had left them. Her basket of tapestry work, her books, a pile of new novels in yellow covers, her harp—so rarely touched after she left the faubourg, the little Louis-seize writing-table, on which she had written so many letters of egotistical complaining to her sister in Paris. The children's toys were scattered about the house; guns, helmets, all the panoply of mimic war, boats, cannon, fishing tackle. In every corner Ishmael came upon traces of those two lives now blotted out for ever. The sight of these things, most of all a cage of white mice, and a hutch full of rabbits in the stables, filled him with unspeakable sadness. The mice and the rabbits were brisk and gay, jumping about in their narrow quarters, with bright restless eyes, while they two, the children he had loved, lay cold and still under the churchyard mound. It is just such a thought as this that fills the cup of tears.

He wandered about all day as if in a dream, revisiting spots he had known and loved in his boyhood, seeing old faces which had a strange look, like a book laid aside and half forgotten.

He could hardly realise the fact that the château with all its surroundings, its farms and dependencies, belonged to him henceforward, although Father Bressant had tried to impress that fact upon him. He felt no joy in the idea of possession, or no joy strong enough to lift his soul out of the gulf of gloom into which it had gone down when he heard of his brothers' death. It was not until after the funeral, when the notary explained his position and its rights and duties, that the practical side of his character began to assert itself.

‘Can you tell me what the estate is worth?’ he asked.

‘About thirty thousand francs a year,’ answered the man of business; ‘but there are accumulations, there are securities worth at least forty thousand francs. Monsieur Caradec lived very closely while he was a widower, and he put aside the economies of that period. He wanted to increase the portion of his younger sons.’

‘Yes, I know he was anxious to do that,’ replied Ishmael. ‘Forty thousand! Do you mean that

this forty thousand is at once available—money that I can have to-morrow, if I want it?’

The little Breton notary looked scared at the question.

‘It is invested in securities that could be realised on the Paris Bourse at a day’s notice,’ he replied; ‘but I hope you do not intend to speculate. Your father amassed that money by economy—sous by sous, I might almost say. And if you are going to jeopardise it——’

‘I am not going to throw it into the gutter,’ cried Ishmael, his eyes shining with a new excitement, an unknown pleasure. ‘I am not going to eat or drink it, or risk it on cards or dice. But I will show you how money can double itself, quadruple itself, multiply itself by twenty. You, in your little towns and villages scattered among the fields, do not know what money means. For the last year I have been pining for capital, were it never so small. My hands have been tied for want of a few thousand francs. Forty thousand is a bagatelle as men reckon money in Paris; but with forty thousand in hand, and the power to raise more upon Pen Hoël.’

‘*Dieu de Dieu,*’ cried the notary with horror, ‘Pen Hoël has never been hypothecated since it was a château, since it had a name.’

‘I will not lose the place where I was born, be sure, Monsieur Ardour. But I must make the best of my inheritance—the inheritance that has fallen to me in spite of myself.’

Once having begun to consider the position from a practical standpoint, Ishmael’s whole mind hardened to the business he had to perform. He dismissed all unnecessary servants. He gave the château into the care of the housekeeper and majordomo, an ancient couple who had been in the decline of life at the period of his mother’s marriage. He made his choice of the horses that were to be kept for farm work, the outdoor servants who were to be retained. Father Bressant went about with him and heard him give his orders, and felt proud of his quondam pupil.

‘Paris has taught you a great deal more than ever I taught you,’ he said in his cheery old voice, smiling at the new master of Pen Hoël.

At the end of that long patient life, a life of self-surrender and ill-requited toil, there was nothing terrible in the idea of death. The good old parish priest had grown familiar with the king of terrors in many a winter night, when he had travelled far, by muddy lanes and wind-swept commons, to carry *le bon Dieu* to some dying peasant. He could smile and be cheerful this evening, albeit he had

laid the master of Pen Hoël in his last resting-place only a little while ago.

‘Paris is a bitter school; but one learns quickly in her classes,’ answered Ishmael. ‘It is a city that hardens flesh and blood into iron.’

‘You have not become iron,’ said the priest. ‘I know your heart is as warm and generous as when you used to steal away through the stable-gate yonder to carry your dinner to a sick child or a feeble old woman. And now tell me something about yourself as we walk back to my cottage, where dinner has been waiting for us for the last hour, and where old Nanon will give me a fine scolding if she has prepared any dainty little dish in your honour—her *haricots panachés*, for instance, or a *lapin aux choux*. And so you have been married for more than two years, and have a pretty little wife? I hope she makes you happy.’

‘She is very good,’ said Ishmael, somewhat sadly, ‘and she has improved herself wonderfully since we were married. She had been taught nothing—brought up in squalor and misery, amidst the most abominable surroundings; and yet she was as white, and delicate, and pure as a rose that has just been flung into the gutter. You would be surprised at the progress she has

made. She plays and sings exquisitely—music is her one especial gift, you see. And she has learnt to speak like a lady, and to dress herself prettily.’

‘Has she learnt to make you happy, Sébastien? That is the main question.’

‘I have so little time for happiness—of a domestic kind,’ said Ishmael, half apologetically. ‘I leave home early; I return late. On some nights I have my club; on other nights I have drawings to make, quantities to take out—a technical business that, connected with my trade. And with Pâquerette’s passion for music, she naturally likes to go, once in a way, to the opera or to a concert, for which her music-master brings her tickets; and so——’

‘You live almost as much asunder as one of those fashionable couples of whom I have read in story-books,’ said the old man gravely. ‘It is not a happy life, Sébastien; it is not a wise life. I have never seen that kind of marriage prosper. Things may go smoothly enough for a little while—monsieur and madame see each other too seldom to quarrel; but the end is always misery, sometimes mingled with shame. However, you can change all that now. You are a rich man, a landed proprietor. You will

bring your wife to Pen Hoël, and you and she can live happily together upon the soil from which you sprang.'

'Leave Paris! Live here, among these quiet fields! Sit down by yonder hearth, as my poor father sat, and fold my arms, and waste my life in one long dull dream! No, Father Bressant; I am not made of the stuff for that kind of death in life. I have only just begun to understand what my work is like, to see my way to leaving my mark upon that thriving, bustling city, which gave me a home when I was homeless. No; when my work is done, and my hair is whiter than yours, I will come back to my *gîte*, like the hunted hare. I will sit down beside the old hearth, and my wife and I will talk of the days of our youth. But in the meantime I must carry out the scheme of my life, for good or evil. Do you know, Father Bressant, that, aided by the capital left yonder by my poor father, I can see my way to a great fortune?' said Ishmael, talking more freely of himself and his prospects to the friend of his boyhood than he would have talked to any other man living. 'My patron and almost partner is an honest man, but a poor man. He has no capital—is content to carry on from hand to mouth, pay wages, and

work for other people. But he has friends—a friend at court. His foster-brother, who once made mud-pies with him in a little village on the Marne, is a man high in the confidence of the Emperor, a man who knows what the future of Paris is to be, long before it is known to a mortal outside his own cabinet. From this gentleman my patron has heard of a plan for the reconstruction of half Belleville—old streets to be pulled down and converted, new boulevards to be built upon waste places. Forty thousand francs invested in the purchase of land now will mean quadruple value a year hence; and I mean to invest every sou, to raise money on Pen Hoël if necessary, in order to profit by this chance. And then my poor pale Pâquerette can play the lady, and can wear silk gowns, and sing in a *salon* full of guests, and be praised and admired to her heart’s content,’ he added, to himself rather than to the priest.

‘Will it be an honest act, Sébastien, this purchase of land upon private information?’

‘Why not? We shall buy the land at its current value—buy in market overt. The future value is our speculation. All our intelligence, all our industry will be brought into the common fund. We shall not make a fortune without

having worked honestly for it. My life must be spent in Paris, Father; but I will bring my wife to Pen Hoël sometimes, for a holiday. It is only a journey of a day and a half now. I will bring her to see the house in which I was born, and the best friend I ever had in my life.'

The two men clasped hands: the younger full of pride and hope—pride in his own strength, hope in a future to be carved by his own hands; the elder, benevolence embodied. They spent the evening together beside the wood fire in the presbytery parlour. The September night was damp and chill, and those blazing logs made the room gay and pleasant. They talked together till the night was late, Ishmael giving his old friend a faithful history of his three years of Parisian life.

Ishmael left the village next morning, remounted the horse he had left at Pontorson, and rode into Fougères in time for the afternoon *diligence*. From Fougères to Paris, by road and rail, was a journey of fifteen hours, and there were gray streaks of morning-light behind the roofs and steeples of Paris as the train crossed the bridge at Asnières. It was past five o'clock when Ishmael arrived, on foot, in the quiet little street at Ménilmontant. But the habits of the house he lived in were of the earliest,

and the portress, who occupied a den at the back of the Morice *ménage*, and acted as *femme de peine* for the whole house, was washing the doorstep, with a liberal ablution of the footway in front of the threshold, when Ishmael came to the door.

He gave her a friendly nod, and was going upstairs when the woman stopped him.

‘The key,’ she suggested, making for her den, where she had custody of the lodgers’ keys and letters.

‘The key!’ he echoed, in a surprised tone. ‘But Madame is at home, is she not?’

The portress shook her head, thrust the key into his hand, and turned back to her pail and her mop, as if anxious to escape interrogation.

‘Madame out, and at such an hour of the morning!’ exclaimed Ishmael, staring at her, key in hand, stupefied after the long journey, the wakeful, agitated night.

‘But yes, Monsieur; Madame went last night. You will find a letter.’

‘Yes, yes; without doubt,’ he answered, in a different tone, remembering in an instant how he had told his wife that she was to go and stay with Lisette if she felt dull and lonely. No doubt she had felt lonely, and she had gone to Lisette. His first impulse was to go straight to the rue Franch-

colline, without going upstairs at all. But he had his valise, and there was a letter; so he went upstairs.

How empty and desolate any house looks to which a man returns expecting to find wife and kindred, and finding no one! What a dreary aspect the very chairs and tables put on! What a sense of ill-usage, disappointment, vexation takes hold of the man, were the absence only temporary, the time of waiting only a question of an hour or two! This morning, in the chill, gray light, the Egyptian candelabra, the bronze sphinxes stared at Ishmael with an ominous look—the closed piano—swept and garnished—not a vestige of those scattered sheets of music, that untidy portfolio which had often vexed his soul—the bedchamber, with the alcove closed—the *armoire*, open, and empty of all those fineries which had filled it to overflowing—all suggested desertion. The rooms looked as if their mistress had left them for ever. Strange that she should make such a clearance in order to go and spend a few days with Madame Moque.

The letter he had been told of lay on the mantle-piece in the bedroom. He opened it without any foreboding. He did not doubt for an instant that it would confirm his supposition as to Pâquerette's movements. The words which he read there were

like a bolt falling from heaven in the midst of calm and sunshine,

‘I have left you for ever. Do not seek to know where I have gone. If you follow me, if you find me, the end will be death for at least one of us. I will kill myself rather than see you in your just anger. Yes, I know that you have been good to me, a thousand times too good for the little that I am worth. I know that I am ungrateful, base, abominable, wickedest among wicked women. But I cannot help myself. I believed once that I loved you. You were good to me, and I looked to you for help, and I was at peace—safe, happy in your company; and I thought that was love. Falsehood, all that! I never knew what love meant till I met the man to whom I have given my heart and my soul, my honour, my hope of heaven, all that I have to lose in this life and the next. Think no more of me; or think of me only as a worthless woman who darkened your life for a little while. I renounce all claim upon you. If you find one worthier of you, marry her, and fear not. I will never stand up and say, “I am his wife.” If there were any law which would break the bond between us, I would accept that law as a blessing to you and to me; but the

tell me that in France marriage means for ever. I will never call upon the law to avenge me if you can find your happiness elsewhere, as I have found mine.

‘Forgive—forgive—forgive—

‘PÂQUERETTE.’

She was gone—fled from him for ever—false wife—dishonoured—shameless—her own hand confessing her infamy. But with whom had she so fled? Who was the traitor? There was not much room for doubt. The only men he had ever trusted or admitted to his home were Vielbois, the little old music master, and Hector de Valnois. It was in Hector, therefore, his friend, his comrade, his confidant, the man who saved his life on the fatal fourth of December—it was in him he had to find his wife’s seducer.

‘It is always the husband’s friend,’ he said to himself bitterly. ‘I ought to have remembered my mother’s history. An example so near home! What should warn a man if not that? And yet I trusted them both. I believed implicitly in her innocence, in his honour.’

He did not stop to break his fast by so much as a crust and a glass of wine; he did not stop to plunge his burning head into a basin of cold

water. With the stain of travel still upon him, he left the house, and started for the rue de Grenelle. A *fiacre* passed on its way to the railway station before he had gone very far, and he hailed the man.

'Rue de Grenelle, a hundred and twenty-five, as fast as you can go.'

The carriage rattled off towards the Bastille, along the rue St. Antoine, across the pont Neuf, by the rue des Saints Pères, and into the quiet of the grave old quarter. Valnois' apartment was in a house at the end of the street near the Invalides. The masons were going to their work at the new church of St. Clotilde as Ishmael drove by the Place Bellechasse. The twin towers, with their crocketed spires, were rising amidst a network of scaffolding. Even in the midst of his trouble the keen eye of the artist-workman glanced at yonder pile with a momentary interest.

The historical hotel had an old-world look as Ishmael entered the paved court, ornamented with great green tubs in which bloomless orange trees and great bushes of box made a show of verdure. The stately entrance was sheltered by a *marquise* in iron and glass, under which the flyman drove his *fiacre*. Ishmael had been to the house many a time before to-day. He had breakfasted with

Valnois and some of his literary friends—had discussed the aspect of public affairs in an atmosphere of coffee and tobacco, in the languid heat of a room with velvet-curtained windows, padded doors and a wood fire. He had sympathised with his friend's dreams, and had been proud of his success—had believed in him as the poet of the future, an undeveloped Musset, a Victor Hugo in the bud.

Was Monsieur de Valnois at home? he asked. No, the porter told him. Monsieur had gone out half an hour ago, doubtless only for a short time, since he had left no instructions. His key was there. Would Monsieur like to go up and wait in the *salon*? The porter knew Ishmael as a familiar friend of Valnois, who had a very easy way with all his friends, and in his small way kept open house as it were. His hospitality was a question of coffee and cigarettes—of a glass of fine champagne or vermouth, but it was freely given always. Men were going in and out of his rooms all the afternoon, and in the evening he went out himself, to return long after the porter's first sleep. This early exit of to-day was an altogether exceptional event.

'I don't know what fly has stung him,' said the porter, when Ishmael had gone upstairs with

the key, ‘to go out at seven o’clock in the morning.’

The porter’s wife shook her head.

‘He took a portmanteau with him last night, and he told me he should be away at least a week,’ she said. ‘I believe that he lost the train, and that there was someone with him when he came back. I caught a glimpse of a figure slipping round the corner of the stairs, while Monsieur Valnois stood waiting for his candle and key, and I believe it was a woman.’

Such a thing could not be, protested the porter. It was not within the limits of belief that any impropriety of that species could be enacted under *that* roof, he being there to defend the sanctity of that honourable house—a house which was still rich in the relics of saintly occupation, a house which had been the dwelling-place of a Monseigneur, a prince of the church, whose violet robes had swept those passages. No, the porter could not think it. He knew that Monsieur de Valnois was lax in his notions, even to the verge of Bohemianism; but however broad a man’s ideas might be, he must know how to respect a house in the rue de Grenelle, between courtyard and garden, a house of the old nobility.

While the porter and his wife were arguing

this point Ishmael opened the door on the *entresol*, and went into his false friend's *salon*. He had some idea of waiting for him there—bearding him in his own den. He half expected to find his guilty wife there in hiding. He had hardly considered yet what those two sinners were likely to do, and how improbable it was that Valnois would attempt to hide another man's wife in his lodgings—how much more likely that they two would fly far from Paris, from France even.

And yet it must needs be difficult for Valnois to expatriate himself. He lived by his pen, the pen of the journalist, the ephemeral writer, who treats of subjects fresh in the minds of men, the novelties of the day—like the *articles de Paris* in the shops on the boulevard—who catches folly as it flies.

Ishmael stood in the midst of the room, motionless, his eyes flaming with anger, like a tiger in his den. The atmosphere was hot and close, tainted with sickly odours of jockey club, the last fashionable perfume, of coffee and wine. The velvet curtains hung over the narrow windows; there were embers still glowing on the hearth, a scent of burning wood. The table was scattered with the *débris* of a hasty meal—a dainty little china coffee-pot, and Oriental cups and saucers, half a bottle

of claret without a cork, a couple of glasses, the remains of a perigord pie in a terrine, a damask napkin flung upon the table, half burnt cigarettes and ashes scattered among plates and glasses—confusion—disorder—the indications of a meal *à l'improviste*—two chairs pushed from the table, opposite each other.

Ishmael plucked aside the velvet curtain and flung open the window, stifled in that tainted atmosphere, charged with perfumes and wine and the faded air of a closed room. De Valnois had not been alone last night. He had supped in company. What if the company were still there ?

The door of the next room stood ajar. Ishmael listened for a sound from within, were it only the half-suppressed breathing of a terrified woman. But there was nothing—not a breath. He heard the orderly footfall of a gendarme on the pavement of the street, the distant cry of a hawker, the bass roll of heavy wheels far off in the awaking city, and the clink, clink, clink of the mason's hammer yonder in the Place Bellechasse: but from within not a sound. And yet he could not believe that the room was empty. She was there—she held her breath—she waited, aware of his presence—hiding, praying for her lover's return—hoping that of those

two one would be slain, and that one her husband. He threw open the door and went in. Oh, what a dainty room!--all the prettinesses and conceits and follies of a *petit maître*, the abbé of Louis Quinze, the *incroyable* of the Directory, the *gandin* of the Empire—the fopling and spendthrift of all time—the same always. Then a wild rage seized upon the strong man. He laughed long and loud, with the harsh horrible laughter of a distraught brain. When man's evil passions come to boiling point they have a power to intoxicate compared with which the drunkenness of wine or of opium is a feeble thing.

‘Are you there, pretty one?’ he cried. ‘Yes, I understand now why you chose this one rather than me—for his fine clothes, his dainty ways, his white hands, his perfumes and kid gloves, and amber-handled canes, and velvet collar, and varnished boots—those are the qualities for which women like you value the things you call men. Come out of your hiding-place *infâme*.’

She was not there: but, as a fatal sign and token of her guilt, trailing over the back of a chair, hung the cashmere shawl which her husband had given her in the first flush of his growing prosperity—the dark red shawl with its Indian border of palm-leaves. How proud he was the day he bought it

for her in the great shop on the boulevard des Capucines! What delight when he unfolded the shawl and wrapped it round his wife’s graceful shoulders. He could recall her little cry of rapture even now, as he stood white with rage before this damning proof of her shame. Was she not there even yet, there in hiding? The shrouded alcove with its curtains of damask and lace mingled in an artistic confusion—massive sweeping folds of crimson brocade half hidden under a foam of old Flemish *guipure*: plenty of covert here for guilt to hide in. Ishmael plucked savagely at the luxurious drapery—plucked it once, twice, thrice, till he wrenched the curtain from its hold and left the slender fabric of gilded woodwork bare. Then, with one sledge-hammer blow of his clenched fist he smashed the baldaquin, which tottered and fell to pieces like a barley-sugar temple. No, there was no one hiding in the sybarite’s alcove. But the rage of destruction had taken hold of Ishmael. There were no bounds to his passionate scorn of all this finery, this unmanly luxury which seemed the outward visible sign of hidden vices. There were no bounds to his hatred of the man who had deceived and dishonoured him. He kicked over the slender *marqueterie* toilet-table, all smiling with loves and graces, and comedy masks, and garlands of roses, and cloven-footed

satyrs lurking among Cupids. He set his heel upon the mirror which had reflected that false face. He hurled over the fragile *bonheur du jour* in amber-tinted satinwood and ormolu, lined with sky blue moire, stuffed with love letters, loaded with *bibelots* in porcelain, gold, and ivory. The work of destruction lasted but a few minutes, during which Ishmael, in that chaos of *bric-à-brac*, dashed about him like a wild beast in a jungle. When all was done he rushed from the room, leaving behind him a trail of shattered furniture, a confusion of ivory hair-brushes, broken perfume-bottles, papers, books, neckties, opera hats, strewn over the Persian carpet like the *débris* of an earthquake.

It had given him a transient relief to work this ruin—just as a man with a racking toothache is solaced for an instant or so by dashing his head against a wall. But when the thing was done he was no nearer real revenge than he had been before. He had only gratified the fierce rage of the moment.

He went back to the little *salon*, white, breathless, after that convulsion of anger. He sat down at the table, and among bottles and glasses and the fragments of last night's meal, he wrote with a pencil on a leaf torn from his pocket-book :

‘I came here to kill you if I could, or to be killed by you. I will not rest day nor night

till the wrong you have done me has been washed out with blood—yours or mine. Do not think to escape me in France or out of France. The sea is not wide enough to part us. The world is not big enough to hold us both. Go where you will, I can follow. My father killed the man who stole his wife. I am a stronger man than my father, and I have less to lose. If it is in our race—an hereditary doom—to be unhappy in our wives, it is also in our race to revenge our wrongs. Where will you meet me, and when? Let it be at once—the sooner the better—lest I should have time to forget myself and strike you in the open street. I should not like to do that, for you once saved my life; but it is well you should know I am a desperate man.’

He stuck his challenge in the frame of the looking-glass, where it could hardly fail to catch de Valnois’ eye on his entering the room. The other side of the glass was choked with notes, cards, invitations; but this side was clear, save for that ominous scrawl, roughly written in a big firm hand.

CHAPTER XII.

‘THEIR ROOTS SHALL BE AS ROTTENNESS.’

THE fly was waiting under the *marquise* in the quiet old courtyard which had seen so many entrances and exits; but perhaps among all goings in and comings out, even of stately hearse with violet velvet trappings and nodding plumes, and solemn *croque-morts*, and bare-headed mourners, none more ominous, more tragical than this departure of Ishmael in the quiet autumn morning, with the hot thirst for blood in his heart. The whole nature of the man seemed to have changed within a couple of hours. The deadly pallor of his face, the sombre fire in his eyes altered his outward aspect almost past recognition: but the transformation within was much more awful; and he himself was keenly conscious of this change within himself presently, as he drove past the church of St. Clotilde, and heard that clink of the mason’s hammer which had been the music of his daily life, the rhythm of happy labour,

and bethought himself that it never more could have the same cheery sound in his ears. There would always be a hideous memory coming between him and his daily work.

He had loved these two, and trusted them implicitly, without a thought of possible evil, had believed in them as he believed in God—first in the woman whom he had saved from a life of sordid misery, next in the man, his friend, who had given him a refuge and shelter from the hail of bullets on the night of the barricades—the man whom he revered as a genius, a creature of a superior clay, a being to whom falsehood and treachery must needs be impossible. And this woman had forsaken him; and this man had dishonoured him. The demon that was awakened in his soul made him a new man. He felt the change in his own nature—felt this awakening of evil passions, and wondered at his own wickedness.

‘Would it be murder to kill him, if we two were together and alone?’ he asked himself. ‘If it were three times murder I should do it. God keep me from meeting him till we can face each other on fair terms. I could not hold my hand. If I had found him in that silken nest yonder I should have slain him with my clenched fist, or beaten in his brains with the first weapon

that came to my hand. I can understand now how murder comes about.'

He told the man to drive to the rue Franch-colline. He wanted to see Lisette, and to get from her any knowledge which she might have of his wife's flight. She must know something; and be it much or little, it was for him to drag that knowledge out of her. She would lie, of course. She had been trained in the right school for that, he thought bitterly. After this should have been done, he had to think of seconds for that meeting which he believed that Valnois would accord him. His acquaintances of the clubs belonged to the working classes for the most part: but there were among them a sprinkling of journalists, *littérateurs* in a small way, men who lived, or starved, by their pens—and such as these de Valnois, bohemian and journalist, could not refuse to meet. There was no chance of finding these men till the evening: and in the meantime it was his false wife whom he wanted to find.

The rue Franch-colline was very quiet at this hour. Everybody who had any work to do in central Paris had gone to do it, leaving this world of the outskirts dull and empty of aspect. The *charcuterie* had its usual ornamental air, an example of decorative art as applied to the varieties of pig-

meat—dainty knuckles of ham in pink paper frills, golden with breadcrumb, or shining with rich brown glaze, festoons of sausages or black-pudding, sardine boxes, pies in crockery cases, truffled cutlets ready for the frying-pan, cheeses savouring of distant provinces, reminding the exile of his native *bourg*, breathing the odours of rural muck-heaps and arcadian pig-styes. The charcutier was sitting in a corner of his shop, spelling out a newspaper, waiting the cheerful hour of the midday *pot-au-feu*, the fumes of which stole gratefully to his nostrils from an adjacent kitchen. Ishmael went straight to the first floor, with only a passing glance at Monsieur Moque. He went up the wretched little staircase screwed into a corner of the shabby old house, where all had been sacrificed to the width and grandeur of the shop, and knocked at the door of Lisette’s apartment, tolerably sure of finding her at home at this hour of the morning.

She did not cry to him to come in, with her usual shrill readiness; but after a pause of at least a couple of minutes, she opened the door and appeared on the threshold, in a *peignoir* of dubious freshness, a *peignoir de fatigue*.

‘You, Monsieur Ishmael! Great Heaven, you are back then, and so soon.’

‘So soon, and yet too late,’ he said. ‘Yes, I

came back at daybreak this morning ; and I have come to ask you what you have done with my wife ?’

‘What I have done!’ cried Lisette, with a slightly over-accentuated air of surprise. ‘Why, Pâquerette is safe and sound at home, I suppose. Where else should she be?’

‘She has left her home for ever. She has boldly avowed her guilt. There is another man whom she loves as she never loved me. That was all a mistake, a delusion. She has taken more than two years to discover her error of judgment ; but the revelation is complete, now that it has come. And she has left me, to follow the lover she prefers. You must have known this, Lisette—you must have seen this coming. You women have the eyes of a hawk for each other’s follies ; and a woman is not demoralised all at once. Pâquerette was pure and true when I married her, pure and true when she wept for our dead child. How has the change come ? Why ? I have never ill-treated her—I have always been the same to her.’

Lisette shrugged her shoulders, with a provoking air of knowing the world, and being above it, indifferent and superior to the pains, and follies, and sins of other people, by force of ex-

perience—as a cynic philosopher of a century old might have been.

‘Who knows how these changes come, ever?’ she said. ‘They always happen unawares. Yes; we all know how good you were to your wife. The same always—perhaps too much the same. The men women like best are the men who beat them one day, and take them on their knees and call them by pet names the next. We want emotions, we others. We want to tremble and to weep sometimes, and to be soothed and consoled. Would you care for your dinner, do you think, if you were never hungry? You treated your wife as if she was a little girl, giving her nice gowns and plenty of pocket money, taking her for a treat on a Sunday, and leaving her to herself all the week; while your head was stuffed with diagrams, and wheels, and figures, and bridges, and markets. That is not the way to deal with a woman, if you want to keep her fond and faithful.’

‘Yes, I was a fool,’ cried Ishmael, ‘a besotted fool. I had so many things to think of, I was so eager to make my way in the world. And yet Heaven knows I was fond of her.’

‘After your fashion, which is a cold fashion,’ retorted Lisette.

‘Tell me,’ said Ishmael, growing angry again, after that brief interval of softer feeling. ‘You know where she is—where he is—where they two are together. Is it in Paris? Is it far away? Wherever it is I have sworn to find them.’

‘And if you find them, what then?’

‘There will be bloodshed—death for one, or both, or all three. My life is ruined. It is like a building—brave, and new, and smiling in the sunshine; and because of some flaw in the foundation, some weakness in a main wall, the whole structure crumbles, in a moment, in a flash, and falls into ruin. I care not who may perish in that ruin. Be sure that *all* shall not escape.’

‘You are going too fast, *mon enfant*,’ said Lisette, looking at him with a compassionate air, almost as she had looked at him in the wretchedest hour of his childhood, when they lived in that miserable barrack near the cemetery. ‘First, I do not know that your wife has run away from you; secondly, I do not know with whom she has run away; thirdly, I do not know where she is; fourthly, I do not know where he is. Now then, are you content?’

‘No,’ answered Ishmael roughly; ‘I am not content, because I do not believe you. I have the avowal of my wife’s guilt in her own handwriting;

I have seen the evidence of her shame an hour ago in Monsieur de Valnois’ apartment—her shawl, my gift, trailing in the slime of that profligate den.’

‘A shawl here or there proves nothing; they make such shawls as that by the hundred,’ said Madame Moque, unable to conceal her contempt for a cashmere of five hundred francs, she who had enjoyed the reversion of an Indian shawl that cost five thousand.

‘I tell you I know,’ said Ishmael; ‘the proof is here,’ striking his breast. ‘It was the instinct of my own heart which told me at once where to seek for the traitor.’

He stood looking round the room with stern scrutinising eyes, as if even here he might find some fresh evidence of his wife’s infamy—the room to which he brought her nearly three years ago, a flower plucked out of the gutter, a brand snatched from the burning.

Madame Moque’s *salon* had not yet assumed its *bourgeois* primness. There were traces of last night’s supper, there was a work-table heaped with old finery in course of reproduction, for the chief occupation of Lisette’s daily life was to recompose her gowns and bonnets, to curl feathers and revivify canbric roses, and clean old silks and satins. Altogether the room had an air of exceeding

slovenliness. The yellow curtains were drawn closely across the alcove, doubtless to conceal the disordered couch within.

‘You need not turn up your nose at my *salon*,’ said Lisette, with a vexed air. ‘One cannot have oneself and one’s room *tirées à quatre épingles* at nine o’clock in the morning.’

Nine o’clock! Was it so early? It seemed to Ishmael as if he had lived through a long day since he turned the key in the door of his lodging yonder: that door outside which Pâquerette had crouched in the gray winter morning, so piteous, so humble, so grateful for a little kindness.

‘I was not looking at your *salon*. I was only wondering——’

‘What?’

‘If you had hidden my wife here.’

‘*Pas de danger*. She has something better to do, if she has gone off with her lover, than to come and hide herself here. I daresay, if it is as you say, they have gone to Havre, and are on board ship by this time, bound for the New World. If I ran away from my husband I would not stay in the old one. *Pas si bête!*’

‘They are not so wise as you,’ retorted Ishmael grimly. ‘They were in the rue de Grenelle last night—I saw her shawl there, I saw the relics of

their feast. They were there last night. He left the house only half an hour before I entered it. When she left it, or how, I cannot tell you. I was too late.’

‘If you had found her ——,’ faltered Lisette, looking at him curiously.

‘If I had found her—an hour ago—feeling as I felt then, I should have killed her,’ he answered; and there was no doubt as to the strength of his own conviction upon this point.

‘What good would that do, except to make a dreadful end of your life yonder?’ said Lisette gloomily, with a motion of her head towards *la grande Roquette*. ‘Life is troublesome enough for all of us, but one does not want to cut it short by spitting in the basket.’

This was the popular manner of hinting at the guillotine.

‘It would have mattered little to me how my life ended just now, if I had had my way,’ said Ishmael. ‘There is a kind of thirst that must be slaked at a crimson fountain. If I had missed him, and she had come in my way, I should have slain her—poor, miserable thing that she is. And now, Lisette, once and for all,’ he went on, putting his two strong hands upon the woman’s plump shoulders with an iron grasp,

holding her as in a vice, and looking into her face with eyes that tried to read her soul; 'you know something about this—much, if not all. You have been her chief companion; you have been with her at the opera; I trusted her with you; she has been your guest, here, in this room, they two together perhaps—God knows—encouraged and protected in their treachery by you——'

'How dare you say such things?'

'You *must* know where they are. Tell me, that I may find him. I am cooler now. I promise you—yes, on my oath—that I will spare her. I will not lift my hand against her. But with him—I only want to be fair and square with him—man to man—face to face—hand against hand. Tell me—tell me—tell me!'

Lisette was ashy pale, and trembled a little in that firm grip. Those fiery eyes looking into hers seemed to burn into her brain. Something she must tell him to satisfy him—no matter what lie, so long as it might for one hour pass for truth.

'I have only heard a word here and there,' she gasped, with a faltering, a reluctance that belonged to the highest dramatic art. 'You don't suppose they would tell *me* what they meant to do—me,

your friend. I heard them whispering together in the corner of an opera box the other night. I could not believe that there was anything wrong. I thought they were both in jest—talking mere nonsense. It was not till you came here just now—till you told me that she had left you—that she had been in the rue de Grenelle; it was only that instant the whole truth dawned upon me. He was talking to her about Brazil—a paradise, he said, where one could live for a little money—live as in the Garden of Eden. If she has fled with him I feel convinced they will go to Brazil. You had better go to Havre if you want to waylay them.’

To Havre! Yes; it was thence the great ships set sail for Southern America. He had thought of them, and dreamed of them often in his boyhood, when he felt that he was one too many at Pen Hoël, and fancied that it would be a glorious thing to make his escape to some larger and wilder region where he might live by his gun, where he could catch a horse and ride it unbroken, over a world that would be for ever new. Havre! yes; he ought to be at the station now, watching for the departure of those vile fugitives, rather than fooling here.

He left Lisette without a word, and drove

to the house he lived in, where he saw Madame Morice, told her that he expected a gentleman to call upon him in the course of the day on very important business, and begged her to be on the alert for any such visit—the charwoman-portress counting for nothing in the way of intelligence, and being rarely on the spot when wanted. Madame Morice would kindly tell the stranger that Monsieur Ishmael would be at home at five o'clock that afternoon to receive any one who should favour him with a call at that hour. Having thus provided against the chance of an answer to his challenge, he drove to the railway station in the rue Saint Lazare, at which he had arrived on the dawn of that fatal day.

The station was not so crowded in 1854 as it is nowadays: but it was the season of sea-bathing, and a good many families were leaving Paris, frightened away by the talk of the cholera. The mid-day train was filling for Havre, Dieppe, Rouen, as Ishmael entered the station. He had just time to make his way to the platform—a matter of difficulty, since he was not furnished with a ticket—on pretence of seeing a friend who was to start by that train. He had time to pass along the platform, peering into the crowded carriages, to see the children on their mother's

laps, the white-capped *bonnes*, the babies, the bonnet-boxes, poodles, adipose fathers, overgrown collegians, all feverish and loquacious with the rapture of leaving somewhere to go somewhere else. He looked into every carriage; but there was no sign of Hector de Valnois or his victim.

He saw the train move slowly and ponderously out of the station, like a thing to which velocity was impossible, and then he went back to the booking office and inquired about the next train for Havre. There was none till eight in the evening. He was free to do what he liked with himself till that hour—free to go back to his desolate rooms and wait for his false friend’s answer to his challenge; free to break his fast, which had not been broken by meat or drink since midnight.

When the door closed upon Ishmael, Lisette turned the key sharply in the lock, and drew a long breath, with the air of one who has just escaped from a great danger. She went over to the alcove, and plucked aside the yellow damask, with the triumphant manner of a woman who feels herself equal to the most tremendous occasion.

‘There, I have got you out of it,’ she cried; ‘but do not give me that kind of thing to do too often, Madame Ishmael.’

Crouching, like a hunted doe, upon the little yellow damask sofa, that had served her as a bed in the days of her girlhood, Pâquerette looked up at her protectress with pallid countenance and eyes large with terror. She had fled there for safety in the early morning, stealing out of the house *entre cour et jardin* on tip toe, before it was light, her lover opening the doors as cautiously as a practised burglar, lest the porter or his wife should be awakened by the scrooping of a bolt, or should discover that the sanctity of that aristocratic mansion had been violated by the shelter of a *pas grand' chose* like Pâquerette, in the dead of the night. She had come to Lisette's house before daybreak, and had begged for shelter there till the evening, when she was to start with Hector for the sunny south, by the mail train for Bordeaux, on the way to the Pyrenees. It had been the dream of the journalist's life to cross the Pyrenees—to see Madrid and Cordova, Seville, Granada, the world of Alfred de Musset and Murillo, the world that seems to have been invented for poets and painters; and to take Pâquerette with him made the fulfilment of that long cherished dream so much the sweeter. Unhappily, Monsieur de Valnois had a habit of mind and body which he believed to be a part of the poetic tem-

perament—a man must needs have the *défauts de ses qualités*. He could never be in time for any appointment with man or woman. Unpunctuality was engrained in him. Thus having planned to meet Pâquerette in the station on the boulevard de l’Hôpital, in time for the Bordeaux mail, he arrived there just ten minutes after the train had started, and found Pâquerette in the great bleak waiting room, pale with fright. What was she to do, where was she to go? She wanted to fly from Paris, to be beyond the reach of her angry husband. She had left a letter on the chimney-piece telling him of her flight. He would be back early next morning. He had told her so in his letter received that afternoon.

‘You should not have written about these follies,’ said Hector, reproving her in his airy way, as if she had been a foolish child. ‘There is never any need to confess one’s sins except to the priest. What shall we do, since the train is lost really and truly? Will you go back to your lodgings and burn the letter, and take some more convenient time for our flight?’

He had a knack of putting off things; and was not in any wise a man of action.

But Pâquerette declared she would not go back to that abandoned home of hers for worlds.

Who could tell? Ishmael might be there already; he might have read her letter — he might be there waiting for her like a wild beast in a cage. She reminded her lover also that all her worldly goods were in the railway station, packed in the two portmanteaux which he had bought for her that morning. Every step had been taken for their flight, except on Hector's part that one detail of being in time for the train.

‘If you will not go back to your own apartment, there is no alternative but to come with me to mine,’ said de Valnois, after a minute's reflection; ‘but I shall have to take you past the porter unawares, for he is a curious person, with a prejudice against your too enchanting sex.’

And now in the chill daylight, the dread to-morrow, the time of reflection, of remorse, of passionate unavailing regret, Ishmael's wife was in hiding with her friend and confidante Lisette Moque. Yes; Madame Moque knew everything: had tried to stem the torrent of guilty passion; had given good advice *par dessus la tête*; but had never refused to go to the Opera with the lovers, to eat ices at Tortoni's, or to sup at a popular restaurant. She had seen them sliding down the fatal slope, had tried to pluck them back, and, failing that, deemed it a virtue in

herself that she had not abandoned them in their sin—that she was ready to be their friend still, in spite of everything.

It had been a week of fever, the time of Ishmael’s absence. The Palais de Cristal was closed for a general painting and smartening and restoration. Lisette had been free to go where she liked with Pâquerette. Ah, what drives they had had in the moonlight, the great harvest moon shining upon them, seeming to countenance their guilty love by that plenitude of glory. The perfect beauty of those September nights seemed a part of their being. What had they to do but love each other in a world where all was so lovely—to love as the birds love; to turn to each other with tremulous lips, impelled they knew not how, as the wind-driven flowers seemed to kiss each other in the woodland?

And then it was a season of terror and strange excitement, this year of war and pestilence. From afar there came the tidings of conquest and bloodshed, and men’s minds were on the alert, expectant of a mighty victory yonder, a victory the news of which was to convulse Paris only a few days later. And while far away in the East the sky was red with the fierce light of battles, here at home there was the darkness of

the grave, and men's talk was of sudden death. Those who were glad and well yesterday were stricken to-day, would be carried to the grave to-morrow. Who could tell where the hand of the slayer would fall next? One lived on the brink of a precipice. Not to be happy to-day was perhaps to lose all chance of bliss for ever. To-morrow one might be lying under the cold, damp ground—out of sight of yonder mellow moon—a prey for the conqueror worm.

Perhaps it was this fever in the air, this breath of the pestilence and ever-present terror of death, that impelled Pâquerette's light feet to the edge of the abyss, that made her oblivious of honour, duty, gratitude, truth, religion, for the sake of a low voice breathing poetic words in her ear, a gentle hand toying with her hair, eyes that looked into hers, shining like twin stars under the starlight. Oh, happy nights, which seemed as innocent as the loves of Titania and her sister-elves, yet meant the ruin of two lives, a blight upon two young souls. How sweet they were! How sweet, amidst the glades of Saint-Germain, in the lamplit supper-room at the Henri Quatre; the scent of mignonette and roses wafted in from the old-fashioned garden, the forest showing dark and mysterious yonder, only a little way from the

open windows: happy hours so lightly spent in the arrowy flight of mirthful words, of half-veiled avowals of love, across the lighted table: happy drives back to Paris, when the chill breath of morning began to steal across the deepening dark of night, and Pâquerette nestled closer to her lover’s side for warmth and comfort, cherished by that encircling arm, hoping that she might die there, after a brief dream of bliss.

Her sin looked of a different colour this morning, as she crouched, still trembling for fear of her angry husband, in the shadow of the yellow curtains.

‘What would have become of you, I wonder, if I had been as wanting in tact as you and that Monsieur of yours have shown yourselves?’ demanded Lisette. ‘Figure to yourself, then, a man who cannot be in time for the train even when he is eloping with another man’s wife! However, thanks to my presence of mind, your husband will be cooling his heels at the Saint-Lazare station, watching all the departures for the West, while you and Monsieur de Valnois are leaving the boulevard de l’Hôpital for the South—provided this clever gentleman does not contrive to lose the train again to-day.’

‘He will not do that,’ said Pâquerette. ‘He

is as anxious to get away from this horrible city as I am.'

She shuddered as she spoke of the great city, as if its very atmosphere were pervaded by her husband's anger—that thirst for vengeance which meant death for her lover, if not for her too.

'Oh! Monsieur de Valnois is anxious to leave Paris, you say. But why?'

'On account of his debts.'

'Oh, he is in debt is he? And is that the capital with which you two are to begin life, *là bas?*'

'How do you mean?'

'I mean what are you going to live upon in the South? Travelling costs money; eating and drinking cost money: even lovers are sometimes hungry.'

'Oh, we shall have plenty of money,' answered Pâquerette confidently, as if the matter needed no discussion. 'You know how clever Hector is. He can always live by his pen—at the other end of the world just as well as in Paris. He has nearly finished a second volume of poems, ever so much finer than the first for which he was paid so handsomely. The new book will bring him a great heap of money, and will increase his reputation as a poet.'

‘I hope so,’ said Lisette, to whose strictly *bourgeoise* temper the prospect did not appear particularly inviting.

Poetry was all very well, but she would have preferred something more solid, more commercial—a new mustard, a lucifer match, an article of daily consumption that all the world might buy.

‘He is to call for me in a *rémise* at a quarter past eleven,’ said Pâquerette, looking at the clock with an anxious air. ‘It is ten minutes past by your clock. Is that right?’

‘Rather slow. It is over the quarter by the right time.’

‘*Mon Dieu*,’ cried Pâquerette, in an agony; ‘if he should lose the train again!’

‘I hope he won’t,’ said Lisette coolly; ‘but he is a poet, and poets have their own ideas about time and money.’

Pâquerette came out of the little alcove, tremulous, pale with apprehension, and put on her bonnet before the glass above the mantelpiece—a neat little black lace bonnet, with a wreath of violets. Small bonnets had only just come into fashion, and they were very small. The Empress had her lovely golden hair for ornament, and all other women in civilised Europe, whether with or without golden hair, were content to copy

the Empress's headgear. They had not yet begun to dye their own hair in imitation of that lovely arbitress of fashion. Pâquerette had a little black lace mantle for her shoulders over her gray silk gown. It was only within the last six months she had aspired to silk gowns.

‘How horrible I look!’ she said, scared by the expression of her face.

‘You look like a lady. The cut of that gown is perfect, though it was made by a poor little half-starved workwoman in a garret,’ answered Lisette, surveying her friend with a critical eye. ‘Hark! there is the *rémise*. You and Monsieur de Valnois have your luggage all at the station—nothing to do but take your tickets and get your places in the train.’

She and Pâquerette ran downstairs. A close carriage was waiting before the door, with Hector in it. He had been about Paris all the morning, whipping up a little money from his employers in the literary line; making engagements to send letters from Spain to one of his papers, to do Spanish articles occasionally for his magazine; discussing the terms upon which his new volume of poems was to be produced, and keeping as much as possible out of the way of his creditors—the upholsterer, the *bric-à-brac* dealer, the tailor, latter,

perfumer, hosier, print-seller, tobacconist—astonishing how many trades came into play to provide the mere necessities of a fine gentleman’s existence. And now he had fifteen hundred francs in his pocket, and was ready to start. There was not a moment to lose.

He had not been back to the rue de Grenelle. He had not seen the havoc that had been made with the furniture, or the challenge in the chimney-glass.

He handed Pâquerette into the carriage, and then looked out to shake hands with Lisette.

‘We are off to the sunny South,’ he said, ‘far away from wars and rumours of wars. We shall never come back to this worn-out town, where there is not a breeze that has not been poisoned by the breath of man. Think of us kindly, Madame Moque.’

Lisette, touched on that sentimental side of her nature which had stood a good deal of hard wear, was moved to tears. Her husband, more practical and not less kindly, came out of his shop with a neat little white paper parcel, tied with the daintiest red tape, such a parcel as one only sees in Paris.

‘You will be hungry on the journey,’ he said. ‘I have made you a sandwich or two—boar’s head with pistachios.’

He put his little gift into Hector's hand, and nodded a friendly farewell. Lisette ran into the road as the carriage drove away, took off one of her well-worn slippers and flung it after the vehicle. She had forgotten for the moment that this departure was not entitled to all the honours of a wedding party.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘THE ROD HATH BLOSSOMED, PRIDE HATH BUDDED.’

IT was the springtide of 1867, year of the gathering of the nations in the great circular glass-house of the Champs de Mars, with its gardens, and fountains and external dependencies, all to be reproduced on a more gigantic scale eleven years later, just as this crystal palace of sixty-seven was a reproduction and extension of the old Palace of Industry yonder in the Champs Élysées. But people talked of this exhibition as of something unsurpassed and unsurpassable, the culmination and ultimate evolution of the system of International Exhibitions. The nations, the newspapers, had been full of rumours about it for the last half a year. It would be finished—it would not be finished—at the appointed time. It would be opened on the very day that had been named—it would not be open till the end of the summer. Paris was on tiptoe; England was expectant but doubtful — those frivolous creatures have no head for business, never are ready with anything, said sturdy John Bull; America was in

a fever, and all that was most distinguished in New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, was already on the high seas.

There was one person in Paris who was utterly indifferent to the opening or non-opening of the monster glass-house on the first of April; one person who thought the whole business an intolerable bore, the clink of hammers, the grinding of wheels a burden and a weariness; and that was a lady who lived in a white-walled villa in one of the new avenues just beyond the *Arc de Triomphe*, and who told her friends, with a shrug and a sigh, that her house had only one fault, and that was being much too near Paris.

This singular person, who did not care for international exhibitions, was a rich widow, Lady Constance Danetree, born in the purple, the daughter of an Irish marquis, married early to a man of old family and large wealth, left a childless widow in her twenty-third year, and now, in her twenty-sixth, leading a life of perfect independence in this brilliant Imperial Paris, where she knew all the best people, and a few of the worst, the white and the black threads being curiously interwoven in the woof and warp of Imperial society—society bent on pleasure as on the chief good in life, society debased and enfeebled by an excessive luxury,

corrupted by illgotten wealth, society which has been compared to Holbein’s Dance of Death around the altar of the golden calf.

‘*Che carnivale!*’ exclaimed an Italian diplomatist on first beholding that glittering court of the Tuileries; and for the lighter portion of society this Imperial reign was verily one long carnival—an age of feasting and revelry, of dancing and masking; one long night of reckless mirth, upon which the morning came suddenly, cold, and bleak, and gray, the morning that saw Paris a beleagured city, and her Emperor a discrowned exile.

Lady Constance Danetree’s mother had been dead ten years. Her father was an eccentric old person, a tyrant of the first water. He lived on his Irish estate half the year, in a castle near the mouth of the Shannon, among a tenantry who hated him worse than the worst of absentees, and spent the other half in London, where his reputation had an odour of the notorious marquis best known to this generation as Lord Steyne, and of that other gentleman familiar in the literature of anecdote under the sobriquet of Old Q. As it was not possible Lady Constance could rejoice in the society of such a father, people hardly wondered that she should prefer Paris to London for residence, and the Riviera to Brighton for recreation.

She had married a rich man without loving him, not because she was poor, or because she was driven into his arms by paternal tyranny. Lord Kilrush was too indifferent to his daughter's destiny to play the tyrant in matters matrimonial. Lady Constance married the first respectable man who offered himself to her, simply because she hated her home, and thought it a happier condition to be the wife of a man of honour, albeit she did not love him, than to be the only daughter of Lord Kilrush.

During her two years and a half of wedded life Lady Constance failed in no single duty, great or small. She made her husband's life supremely happy, so happy that Mark Danetree had no need to question the nature of his wife's regard for him. She was his good and true helpmeet, the pride of his heart, the glory of his home; and when fate snapped the thread of his days unawares by an accident in the hunting field, in a ditch on his father-in-law's estate, he died with his hand in hers, his pale lips murmuring broken words of gratitude for the blissful life she had given him.

Mark Danetree had been dead nearly four years; and people had almost forgotten that Lady Constance had ever been anything but a widow. The condition, with all its freedom and dignity,

seemed her natural state. She was one of the queens of Parisian society, went where she liked, spent as much as she liked, said what she liked, did what she liked; and it seemed to her friends in France as if she had been born so. They could not picture her in a state of bondage, bowing her neck to the yoke, accepting the mastery of father or husband.

'She's a delicious woman; but what a devil of a life she must have led Danetree!' said an Englishman who had never met her till the days of her widowhood. He would hardly believe the better informed individual who tried to explain to him that Lady Constance's conduct as a wife had been perfect.

She was beautiful exceedingly, with the grand lines and rich colouring of a high born Irishwoman. Her profile was classical, and the face, so perfect in modelling, so statuesque in its harmony, might have failed to touch the heart of man, had it not been for those lovely Irish eyes of deep dark gray, shaded by long black lashes.

'With such eyes as those a woman may do anything,' said a Parisian, discussing the lady at his *cercle* over the inspiring glass of absinthe *avec beaucoup de gomme*, which was the fashionable before-dinner stimulant. 'If some of our Cocodettes

had those eyes they would go further than they do.'

'*Pas possible,*' replied his friend; and indeed in those latter days of the Empire there were few extremities left for the great ladies of Paris to touch. They had *lived*, those grand ladies of the Imperial court: they had rubbed shoulders with the *demi-monde*; they had sat at the feet of Cora and her sisterhood. They dressed, they talked, they danced, they sang; after the women of whose very names they were supposed to be ignorant. Cora and the Empress divided the sovereignty of fashion; and to judge by the style of the women of that period, it would seem that Cora's influence had the wider range. The Empress was lovely, graceful, gracious, a woman of exquisite taste; but Cora had *chic*—Cora had the art of astonishing society. It was all very well for handsome women to mould themselves upon the refined manners of the Empress; but a woman of quality might be as ugly as sin and yet attract admiration, if she only were bold enough to imitate Cora. It was Cora who first taught the women of Paris to enamel their faces, to paint their eyebrows and eyelids, to draw blue veins upon their alabaster foreheads, to wear a cascade of somebody else's hair flowing down their backs like a horse's tail. It was

she who invented short petticoats, Polish boots, chaines Benoîtons. Zanita, the pale and elegant beauty of 1854, was dead and forgotten; and Cora reigned in her stead: and compared with Zanita's refined loveliness, Cora's coarser charms were as Rubens unto Raffaele, or as Baudelaire to Musset. She was said to have received from London a magical casket containing all the elements of beauty; in any case it was she who invented the *sexe maquillé*.

If change and progress and ever increasing wealth had set their mark upon the time, death had not been idle. The ranks of the great had thinned since the days of Crimean victory. In the Lenten season of '64, after briefest illness, like a candle blown out by an unexpected gust of wind, there had vanished from the Imperial pageant one of the most important factors in the *coup d'État*, and, from a social standpoint, the most brilliant outcome of the Empire. This was de Morny, gentleman-financier, man of business to the tips of his fingers, manufacturer of beet-root sugar in the Puy-de-Dôme, picture-dealer in Russia, railway-speculator in France. In finance a genius; as courtier and fine gentleman, patron of arts and letters, the stage, the opera, the finest type of the age which he adorned. He died, and

left no lasting gap in the arena of public life : but to that lighter world of pleasure, the world of balls and dinners, theatres and picture-galleries, boudoirs and *parties fines*, it was as if a star had gone down, and the horizon of life was so much the darker for that vanished glory.

Gone, too, Cavour, the modern Machiavel, the master-mind of Europe; Palmerston; Leopold of Belgium; Pélissier. Great actors were departing from the stage of European politics; but in the *coulisses* of diplomacy there lurked a figure which was soon to loom large upon the scene—Bismarck, the Prussian, upon whose broad shoulders Cavour's mantle was said to have fallen.

The Paris of to-day was a vastly different place from that city along whose dingy quays Ishmael had looked on a November evening in the year 1850. Seventeen years of enterprise, improvement, vast expenditure, had made the old city into a new city, a place of broad boulevards piercing east and west, and north and south; a place of mighty theatres, and newly-erected churches that were as gaudy in colour and gilding as a mediæval *châsse* or an Indian tomb; a place of new bridges, rich in sculptured emblems, recalling the triumphs of French arms from Jena to Inkermann; a place of parks and palaces, foun-

tains and gardens, villas and avenues—with suburbs stretching far and wide, dotted about with those Swiss *châlets*, Norman *châteaux*, Italian villas, *maisonnettes à la moyen-age, à la Renaissance*, with which the little shopkeeper who has saved money loves to disfigure the landscape around Paris. The old wish of the Parisian *bourgeois* to possess a gable in the street, has grown into the desire for a house and gardens at Asnières or Bellevue.

Opulence and luxury were the leading notes of the Imperial reign. The famous Mr. Spricht, the man-milliner patronised in the Tuileries, had built himself a palace with a fortune made out of *chiffons*. Everywhere there appeared signs of universal prosperity. Among the poorest *arrondissements* of the city, amidst the vanishing slums of old Paris, gardens bloomed and fountains played as in an Arabian fairy tale. The enemies of the Emperor sneered at these glimpses of Eden in the midst of squalor, and grumbled that money was spent upon flowers and fountains which ought to have been expended on free schools; but in spite of these malcontents Paris thrived and rejoiced in the sunshine. Her hospitals, her charities of all kinds had attained a perfection only possible in a country where

benevolence has been made a science. Everywhere, from the workman's boulevards yonder, boulevard Richard Lenoir, boulevard de la Villette, to the Italian palace of painter or princess, newly risen in the once shabby purlieus of the Parc Monceaux—westward, beyond the triumphal gate, where hills had been levelled and old streets carted away to complete the Parisian's paradise of avenues, and villas, gardens, shrubberies, fish-ponds, cascades ; eastward—southward—northward—everywhere the hand of improvement had been busy. Spade and pickaxe, hammer and chisel had created a new Paris—a Paris of tall white palaces, sculptured pediments, classic porticoes, Corinthian friezes, caryatides, ogee mouldings, brackets, festoons of fruit and flowers, repeating themselves in the same fresh stonework along an endless perspective—a Paris of intolerably long streets, and asphalte pathways that burnt the feet of the weary—a city of dissipation, pleasure, luxury, extravagance, and ruin—a gulf for men's fortunes, a pest-house for men's health, a grave for intellect, honour, manhood, religion—and quite the most delightful city in the world.

Lady Constance Danetree lived her own life in her perfect villa in the Bois, and troubled herself not at all about the follies or the vices of the

great city yonder; and the breath of the pestilence left no taint upon her. The people she liked best and saw most belonged chiefly to the artistic classes. She was a woman of many tastes—painted, played divinely, sang a little, but only to her intimates, for her voice was an impassioned contralto, with a *timbre* which seemed made to reveal the inmost feelings of the singer's heart. She never sang frivolous music, and she never sang before indifferent people. She read immensely, and liked to associate with her intellectual superiors. For her own class she cared little, as a class; but she had a few chosen friends belonging to the aristocracy of England and France; and in the houses of these friends she met the fashionable world of Paris, and saw Parisian life with all its absurdities, all its vices, all its caprices, pass before her as a panorama, in which she was but faintly interested.

Her life, albeit she had some friends and a herd of acquaintances, was a lonely life: but Constance Danetree did not dislike solitude. Perhaps any other woman in her place would have invited some maiden cousin to share her home, or would have hired a companion. But Lady Constance needed no sheep-dog to keep her in countenance; and the perpetual society of any

one person, however delightful, would have bored her intolerably. She opened the doors of her villa occasionally to her own or her husband's kindred, entertained her guest, or guests, regally for a week or two, showed them all that was worth seeing in Paris, made herself delightful to them in every way, and never breathed freely till her carriage had driven them off to the station.

In lieu of human companionship, which is apt to be obtrusive, Lady Constance had some canine friends, trained to an obedience so perfect, a sympathy so delicate, that their presence never wearied her. Her three friends were Lion, a superb colley, black and tan, with as much nobility in the form of his head as you would find in half the peerage; Bijou, a soft white Pomeranian, with the eyes of a gazelle, and a tender melting nature which seemed always entreating to be loved; and Skip, a very perfect being of the fox-terrier breed, with a pedigree as historic as a duke's. These three had the *entrée* to every room in the villa, and had never jeopardised their privileges by bad behaviour; but Bijou alone was allowed to accompany her mistress in her drives and shopping expeditions, as she alone possessed that repose of mind which reconciles a dog to lying on the back seat of a

carriage, as motionless and supine as the Esquimaux bearskin on which she reclines.

Lady Constance, reared in the south of Ireland, daughter and wife of mighty hunters, was a fine horsewoman, and kept a couple of hacks for her own riding—no groom was ever allowed to mount either. She rode every morning, and in all weathers—rode early and far a-field; and before noon she was generally established in her boudoir, reading, writing, practising, as the fancy seized her. She received her friends in the afternoon, and was one of the earliest to introduce into Parisian circles the thoroughly British institution of five o’clock tea; *ce petit* five-o’clock lunch, as it was called by her French friends.

Upon this sunny afternoon in March, when the almond trees were coming into flower, and when tulips and hyacinths made a blaze of colour in Lady Constance Danetree’s garden, her *salon* was not empty. Lady Valentine, her most particular friend, a clever matron of forty, a woman of the world in the best sense, had just dropped in for half-an-hour’s chat before her drive round the Bois, bringing with her the last of her *protégés*, a young Frenchman, and a new poet. There is always a new poet in fashionable Paris. Every season has its chosen bard, declared by the

unanimous voice of the dilettanti to be the coming man, author of a very thin little volume of thinner verse, printed on chalky paper, with carmine initials and engraved tail-pieces—and of whom the French people at large never hear.

The Vicomte de Pontchartrian was the coming man in the *salons* of sixty-seven. He had published his little yellow volume—‘*Mes Râles*’—and had accomplished a *succès fou* in half-a-dozen drawing-rooms between the Champ de Mars and the Place de la Concorde. His ‘*Râles*’ were short detached lyrics—brief flights in the fashion of Heine—spasmodic—inconsecutive. His Pegasus had not the strong wing of Musset or Hugo, or even the calm narrative power, the somewhat languid grace of Lamartine. His flights were mere convulsions—short bounds into space, landing him nowhere in particular, or occasionally in an abyss of bathos. But as his verses were audaciously blasphemous, passionate, and charged with obscure meanings, the *femmes savantes* and the *précieuses ridicules* of sixty-seven raved about him, fought for the privilege of having him at their parties, plied him with sweet cakes and tea, flatteries and sympathy, and did all in their power to feed a self-esteem which had long been the Vicomte’s particular *bosse*. He was not the ideal

poet of the *grisette* and the quartier Latin. He did not wear his hair long, or affect the unconventional in costume. On the contrary, he dressed and demeaned himself with an extreme precision, studied mathematical exactness in his neckties and waistcoats, bought his hats in London, wore always the correct thing at the correct moment, and was as careful as if a hair's-breadth too much in the width of a collar, or the sixteenth of an inch in the length of a coat tail, would be sudden death to his pretensions. He was the true type of *petit crevé*, small, *chétif*, prematurely bald, with eyes that had faded in gaslighted rooms, a wan complexion, an aristocratic little nose, and a neat little moustache, so slender, so sparse, that the gummed points were as sharp as a pair of compasses. He was polite to punctiliousness, courteous, velvety. He affected the tone of Versailles and Marly in the days of the great king. If his sentiments were *louches*, his manners were irreproachable. Blasphemy was the leading note of his versification, but he had never been heard to swear. He had a little language of his own when he wanted to be abusive. He had a host of small originalities, infinitesimal inventions which passed for a great talent in that society of sixty-seven.

But if the little Vicomte was a great man in

the *salon* and the boudoir, he was a very small man in that republic of letters which in these days held its *cénacle* sometimes after midnight on the ground floor of the *café Riche* ; sometimes in that mystic chamber, number sixteen at the *café Anglais*, known as the *grand seize salon*, with flaming windows shining upon the boulevard and on the Rue de Marivaux, privileged apartment, where beauty, art, and literature supped gaily after the theatres were closed. How much that was brilliant and transient in the phantasmagoria of Paris shone and sparkled and lived its brief hour of delight in that famous supper room : what wit, what gaiety, what reckless rapture in the present, what cynical recklessness of the future ! How many are dead for whom the wine sparkled, and the lights burned in those nights of revelry : how dim are the beauties whose charms were then in their noontide : how altered and saddened is the world we live in. Amongst the *grands viveurs*—Gortschakoff, Demidoff, Gramont—Caderousse, Raphaël Bischoffsheim, Daniel Wilson—the Vicomte de Pontchartrian was a minnow among the tritons, while among the greater lights of the literary firmament, Gautier, Augier, Dumas, Feuillet, Sardou, and the rest, the author of ‘*Mes Râles*’ gave forth as feeble a glimmer as

one of those attenuated tapers which are carried by white-robed maidens in the processions of a village church.

Lady Constance had other visitors this afternoon--Madame Jarzé, a large matron, and her two marriageable daughters--marriageable for the last few years, but still in full pursuit of eligible husbands. The father was an official of the Empire, a great man at court, but with an income too small for the comfortable maintenance of such luxuries as a handsome wife and two attractive daughters. The elder girl, Hortense, disappointed and embittered already at four-and-twenty, had taken to literature, and set up for an *esprit fort*. She was among that modern Orphic society which expounded the mysteries of the new poet, pretended to understand him as no one else could, and was suspected of having set her heart upon marrying him. Amélie, the younger, who was very fair, very fresh, very pretty, but with a suspicion of artifice in the darkness of her lashes, the golden tints in her hair, affected the *genre bébé*, and was the more popular of the sisters. She wore innocent little hats, rather infantine gowns, and a crop of fluffy curls, frizzling childishly all over her head, at a period when other women wore Japanese chignons of satiny smooth-

ness. Amélie suppressed her forehead, which was not devoid of intellect, and hoodwinked society with a shock of golden curls, which came down almost to her eyebrows, and imparted a charming simplicity, verging on silliness, to her *petit minois chiffonné*. To have a *petit minois chiffonné*, a *museau d'enfant gâtée*, was Amélie's highest ambition. Was not the *petit minois chiffonné* the favourite type yonder in the quartier Breda, the region of Nôtre Dame de Lorette? The *petits museaux* drove the best horses in the Bois, and owned the prettiest victorias, and drove to the theatres in delicious little *coupés*, hardly big enough to contain a crinoline and a cavalier.

The talk began naturally with the Exhibition, whether it would or would not be ready by the first of April, the biggest *poisson d'avril* which the Emperor had ever offered to his subjects. People talked of the circular show in the Champs de Mars, just as they talk of the weather, when there is no other stock subject ready to hand. All the kings and potentates were coming to Paris for the great industrial fair. From Egypt, from Turkey, from the far, far East they were to come. Old King William of Prussia, big with those late victories of his, swollen with the triumph of Sadowa, was to be there with his statesman

Bismarck, and his general de Molke, for whose tepid friendship Napoleon had sacrificed the interests of Austria, by that neutrality which his best friend, the Queen of Holland, stigmatised as a blunder that was worse than a crime. The Emperor of all the Russias was coming. Paris was to bristle with sceptres. There were rumours that Victor Emmanuel would *not* come. There were some rather sharp letters passing just now between France and Italy. All friendships must come to an end. But the rugged chieftain of Savoy, the soldier of fortune, would hardly be missed amongst that crowd of crowned heads.

They talked of Mexico and her fated Emperor over whom the shadows of calamity were darkening, till all the horizon around him looked black as night. In the October of last year his personal possessions were on board an Austrian frigate—he had made all his plans for leaving Mexico, to rejoin his afflicted wife in Belgium; but at the last moment his clerical counsellor, Father Fischer, aided by a letter from the Empress Eugenie, meant only to offer consolation for past reverses, had succeeded in rekindling the flame of ambition. New manifestos had been issued, more blood had been spilt, and now, in this March of sixty-seven,

General Bazaine and the French forces were on the high seas; while Maximilian, with a handful of faithful followers and an army of nine thousand troops, was to all effects and purposes a prisoner in the city of Queretaro, hemmed round by the republican forces, which were growing daily stronger under General Escobedo.

‘This is a sorry end to *la plus belle pensée du règne*,’ said Lady Valentine, quoting one of the Emperor’s flatterers. In those days there were only two sections in the political world—partisans who flattered grossly, enemies who slandered ruthlessly. Truth had vanished from the political horizon. Everybody knew in his heart of hearts that the Imperial car was on the downward slope. The supremacy of France as the conqueror of Russia, the liberator of Italy, was over. Neutrality in Europe, failure in Mexico, had tarnished those laurels won in the past. A nation that would be great by arms must never leave the sword too long in the scabbard. Napoleon was trying in these latter days to realize that old promise made at Bordeaux, almost on the eve of the Crimean War—‘*L’Empire c’est la paix*.’ But the attempted realization worked ill, and it seemed that peace meant weakness. ‘*On peut tout faire avec des baïonnettes, excepte s’asseoir*

dessus,’ said Plon-Plon. ‘The real loser at Sadowa was France,’ said the astute among politicians; and it was to Germany that kings, sages, and people looked for the newly rising star.

‘And what has it cost us, *cette belle pensée*?’ inquired Madame Jarzé.

‘Oh, only a thousand millions or so in hard cash and credits, and—say the tenth part of the *élite* of our army,’ answered the Vicomte, who never exhibited any signs of emotion.

‘But you have Marshall Bazaine coming back to you safe and sound,’ said Constance; ‘surely that is some compensation for your losses *là bas*.’

‘We could have spared him better than a worse man,’ replied the Vicomte, misquoting Shakespeare.

‘Papa does not like Marshall Bazaine,’ said Amélie; ‘he thinks him a *pas grand* chose.’

‘I heard rather a good thing of one of our soldiers in Mexico,’ interjected Pontchartrain. ‘When the cholera was decimating our troops this fellow wrote on the wall of the cemetery—*Jardin d’acclimatation*. Be sure that man was a Parisian.’

‘Do you think that wit is a fruit of the Parisian soil, Vicomte?’ asked Lady Constance.

‘It may grow elsewhere, Madame, but it only ripens in Paris.’

They had been talking for nearly half an hour, and not a word had been said about the Vicomte's poems. Hortense felt that he must be bored, since the only subject that interested him was his own talent.

'I forget which of Monsieur de Pontchartrain's poems you told me impressed you the most, dear Lady Constance,' hazarded Hortense, hoping to lure her hostess into a eulogistic criticism.

Unfortunately Constance had also forgotten. She leaned her dimpled chin upon her forefinger, not a weak chin by any means, but round and firm as marble. She reflected for a few moments, her dark-gray eyes grave and beautiful. The little Vicomte gazed upon her with as intense a look as those pale orbs of his were capable of, gazed and thought what a heavenly way it would be out of all his difficulties if this lovely English-woman would marry him, and let him have the spending of her fine fortune.

'Let me see,' said Constance; 'which of the poems most impressed me? Was it that one about the dead dog? So striking, so original! Two happy lovers are walking along a willow-shaded bank by the river in the summer twilight, full of gaiety and hope, when they come suddenly upon a dead dog—a poor drowned corpse—bloated and

noisome, and ravaged by crawling creatures that prey upon the dead. The description of that poor carrion is so exquisitely graphic! And they think that as that carrion is to-day so will they be a few years hence—a thing for worms and flies to feed upon—a source of foulness and pollution. Yes, I think perhaps that was the poem which startled me most.'

The Vicomte was delighted.

'You have divined my own thoughts,' he said; 'that lyric was *my* favourite. I wrote it with my heart's best blood.'

'What a nasty idea!' exclaimed Amélie, putting on her baby air, 'when ink is so clean—and so cheap!'

'*Cruche*,' muttered her sister, angrily.

'Yes; it is a powerful poem—a little brutal, perhaps; but the brutal is now an essential element in poetry,' said Constance, musingly.

'And to think that the world once called Byron immoral,' exclaimed Lady Valentine 'Byron who only shocked the sensitive upon one or two points. The modern school has gone so far beyond him in far-reaching esoteric immorality that Byron has an air of having written with milk and water. And even in Byron's life-time Shelley went much further than he. It is the plain-speaking that

offends, I think,' pursued her ladyship, who was strong-minded and of a ripe age, and who had no fear of touching a delicate subject. 'The man who calls a spade a spade, is sure to shock people; but another man may hint in a subtle, between-the-lines way, at things that are infinitely worse than spades, and yet printers will print, and publishers will publish, without fear of consequences. By the by, Vicomte, your verses remind me of a book I read last year—not a new book by any means—a book of poems published in the beginning of the Empire—*Mes nuits blanches*—by a certain Hector de Valnois,—a very clever book—a book full of strong things, mixed up with a few absurdities, after the manner of you poets.'

Pontchartrain's countenance assumed the blankness of a stone wall. He had never heard of *Mes nuits blanches*. He doubted if the book had made any impression in literary circles.

'Strange!' exclaimed Lady Valentine; 'I should have thought you had read all the books of mark written within the century, and this really is a book of mark; and I am told was a good deal praised in its day. I wonder the writer never did anything more. Has nobody heard of this Monsieur de Valnois?'

Lady Constance had not, nor Madame Jarzé, who rarely read anything beyond the fashion magazines, the *Figaro*, and the *Journal pour rire*.

‘What a singular coincidence! It was only the other day that I heard of a man who was described to me as the author of *Mes nuits blanches*, a volume of verse which achieved a *succès fou* in its day,’ cried Amélie, full of animation. ‘Such a curious story. You know I am always stumbling upon curious stories.’

‘Or inventing them,’ muttered Hortense, with a sinister glance at her sister.

‘You know M. de Kératry, that amusing young fellow who brought out a *vaudeville* at the Variétés last winter? It was he who told me all about this forgotten poet. He knows him intimately—in a kind of way.’

‘What do you mean by “in a kind of way”?’

‘Well, this poor man who wrote *Mes nuits blanches* has gone down in the world—he does not go into society any longer, lives in some wretched hole in the quartier Latin, in some undiscoverable street behind the Luxembourg. But he was once a man of fashion, I believe—once handsome, once elegant.’

‘Like the Vicomte’s dead dog, he has had his day, and now he has come to the carrion stage, or nearly, I suppose,’ said Lady Constance.

‘Very nearly. I’m afraid from Monsieur de Kératry’s description of this poor thing’s coat and hat that he must be almost as badly off as the dog. He is a *teinturier*.’

‘A dyer!’ exclaimed Lady Valentine, with disgust. ‘Those passionate verses written by a dyer, a man who dyes his dog red one day and yellow the next, and sends the poor brute into the street to advertise his master’s last new dye. I have always hated Parisian dyers since I saw that yellow dog. I believe he was of the same breed as your Bijou, Constance. Think if such a fate were to befall her!’

‘I do not mean a dyer of that kind,’ said Amélie, scarcely concealing her scorn of Lady Valentine’s ignorance. ‘A *teinturier* in literary circles is a man who touches up—re-writes—or in some cases writes altogether—another author’s pamphlet, or play, or book. That was how Monsieur de Kératry became acquainted with this out-at-elbows poet. He had written a delicious little *vaudeville*, full of smart things, but quite unactable—charming songs and duets, utterly unsingable. “I should like to give you a

chance," said the manager, "but your play wants licking into shape. You had better take it to a fellow I know, who was once a genius—wrote plays, poetry, criticism, political articles—and who now does piecework for anything he can get." Monsieur de Kératry took the hint, and carried his play to the poor man in the quartier Latin, who took it all to pieces as if it had been a clock that wouldn't go, and put it all together again in admirable working order.'

'Wonderful!' cried Lady Constance. 'And so that is what a literary *teinturier* does. One is always hearing of new professions in Paris.'

'*Cela ne se peut pas*,' said the Vicomte.

He had been looking intensely bored, and even angry, while Amélie told her story, no doubt disgusted at his own personality being shouldered out of the conversation by this literary Bohemian of the quartier Latin.

'But, my dear Vicomte, I tell you *that is*,' protested Amélie. 'I have been relating an absolute fact. For five napoleons this poor man remodelled our friend's play.'

'*Cela ne se peut pas*,' repeated the poet doggedly, and with infinite disgust. 'A man of honour could never lend himself to such a

transaction. What, stand before the public as the author of a work improved, remodelled, you say, by another hand? Impossible.'

He bristled, he reddened with indignation. Never had they seen him so excited, and by a subject which could have no personal interest for him. He was consumed with the righteous rage of the just man who cannot endure the mere thought of evil—of the man whose nice sense of honour cannot brook the smallest sophistication.

'I suppose a poet has loftier ideas about such things than a man who writes *vaudevilles*,' said Amélie, with her innocent air. 'Monsieur de Kératry seemed to think there was nothing wrong in the matter. He would not have told me if he had been ashamed of it.'

'There are men who are such intolerable egotists that they will talk of their own meannesses rather than not talk of themselves,' said the Vicomte, still indignant.

He had set down his tea-cup in a tumult of fine feeling, and was pacing the room in front of the long plate-glass windows—people in Paris were still in that uncultivated condition of mind in which large sheets of plate-glass, letting in the sky and the trees and flowers, and all the loveliness of the external world, were deemed admirable.

They had not risen to that finer and more artistic sense of beauty which excludes the sky and the garden, and composes picturesque effects out of small window panes, sumptuous draperies, and a perpetual twilight. The delight in darkness, dust, and Alma Tadema interiors had not begun. This may have been because the art of *maquillage* was a new thing, and there were still women of fashion who could face the light.

‘After all, it can be no worse than collaboration,’ argued Amélie, a young person not easily put down. ‘I can see no difference.’

‘Did your friend put this other person’s name on the title page of his *vaudeville*?’ asked the Vicomte.

‘I think not.’

‘Of course not,’ retorted the poet; ‘that makes all the difference. He accepted another man’s aid, not as a partner in his work, in his profit, in his fame. He palmed off the talent of another as his own—took credit for the thoughts of another man’s brain. I tell you once again, Mademoiselle, among men of honour, *cela ne se peut pas*.’

The last words came with a serpent-like hiss from the thin lips of the *petit crevé*.

Amélie shrugged her shoulders.

‘*Cet homme est assommant*,’ she muttered, as

she rose to accompany her mother, who was taking leave of Lady Constance.

Hortense lingered over her *adieux* to the poet, who was evidently out of humour.

‘You will not forget this evening,’ she said pleadingly, looking at the sallow pinched countenance with beseeching eyes.

Even love itself could not think the Vicomte handsome, but Hortense thought him intellectual, spiritual, patrician, almost divine; and she was not ashamed of her worship. Perhaps she had begun by flattering him wantonly and wilfully, in her quality of *demoiselle à marier*, and had come at last to be the dupe of her own flatteries. It would seem in any case that her present feeling for Paul de Pontchartrain was sincere to agony.

‘What is there to remember for this evening in particular?’ he asked with a blank look.

Hortense smiled a pained smile, as of one who hides a wound.

‘Mamma’s Thursday,’ she said. ‘You will come, will you not? We shall have some very good music to-night.’

‘I am getting to detest music,’ he said curtly; ‘it is the same everywhere—Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, *plein le dos*. And I have so many engagements. It seems to me that it is always Thursday.’

‘You were not with us last week.’

'Was I not? One lives so fast in the season—and this year the pace has been increased from *presto* to *prestissimo*. But I will be with you this evening if you really wish it.'

'You know that I wish it,' she answered, looking him straight in the eyes.

The look was as plain a confession as the Vicomte de Pontchartrain, in his character of lady-killer, had ever received; but the day was past when such avowals had power to move him. He put on a little tender consolatory smile, and murmured blandly—

'Count upon me, dear Mademoiselle.'

He pressed the little hand in its light pearl-gray glove, and so they parted.

While the Vicomte was being canvassed by Hortense, Madame Jarzé was applying her own powers of persuasion in another direction.

'I hope we shall see you this evening, Lady Constance,' she said.

'Ah, it is Thursday again!' exclaimed Constance. 'How short the weeks are in March! It seems only the other day that I spent such a delightful hour in your *salon*.'

'That other day is more than eight weeks ago,' said Amélie reproachfully. 'It was just after the *jour de l'an*.'

‘And to-night we shall have some particularly nice people,’ continued Madame Jarzé. ‘Among them there is some one I want so much to present to you. You have heard me talk of Monsieur Ishmael.’

Had Lady Constance been strictly sincere she would have said that for the last three months she had heard Madame Jarzé talk of no one else.

‘That is the millionaire, I think,’ she said, with her quiet smile, a smile full of subtle meanings. ‘Yes, I have heard you mention him. I have heard other people talk of him too.’

‘A man has only to make a million sterling, and all the world will talk of him,’ interjected the Vicomte in his most acrid tone. ‘There is no true sovereignty in this Paris of the second Empire except that of *sa Majesté l’argent*.’

‘It is not on account of Monsieur Ishmael’s money that *we* care for him,’ said Amélie, tossing up her head. ‘We are not that kind of people. It is for his noble mind, his great qualities, the good he has done, that we like him. And I am sure, Lady Constance, if you only knew as much of him as we do, you would admire him for the same reasons.’

‘One hears so much of new people and of new things in Paris that they are stale in a

week,' said Constance, with a languid elevation of firmly pencilled brows. 'There is such incessant talk—every subject is worn threadbare, and one gets to hate people before one sees their faces. At least *I* do. But I have no doubt this millionaire person is perfect, since you all think so much of him.'

'*I* do not think much of him, Lady Constance,' protested the Vicomte; 'pray leave me out of it. I think that he is a *parvenu* after the manner of all other *parvenus*; only he is just a little cleverer than most of them—lives plainly, dresses plainly, is not effusively generous—does not pose as patron of artists and men of letters—and contrives to make his wealth as little obnoxious as possible. But I've no doubt the heart of the man is bloated with pride.'

'He has not an iota of pride,' exclaimed Amélie, blushing prettily with indignation. 'I believe he forgets that he is rich. I once told him so, and he only laughed and said, "At any rate, Mademoiselle, I do not forget that I was once poor."'

'Very neat,' said the Vicomte; and then in a tone of perfect innocence he said, 'What an excellent adventure this Monsieur Ishmael would be for any enterprising *demoiselle à marier*. In the old

times, when Louis Philippe was king, it used to be the parents who arranged marriages, I am told. The daughters came out of their convents, *jolies à croquer et bêtes à faire peur*, and were married by family contract. But now young ladies are free lances. They dress like the *demoiselles Benoîton*, have debts like a young man of family, and go into society with sword and bow, like the knights of old, to make their own conquests, their own captives.'

'Do you regret the old fashioned customs, Vicomte?' asked Lady Constance, laughingly.

'Not in the least. Society is ever so much pleasanter since young ladies have been adventurous; and I believe the young ladies themselves do better by the new system.'

Amélie turned her back upon him, with an indignant rustle of her gray *glacé* flounces.

'I hope we have said enough to raise your curiosity, and that you *will* come this evening,' said Madame Jarzé, sweeping her voluminous *moiré* towards the door with a mighty rushing sound.

Lady Constance sighed.

'How glad I should be if I could feel curious about anything in this world!' she said. 'However, I will come to make the acquaintance of your Monsieur Ishmael. What a strange name! He is

a Jew, I suppose. Paris is choked with rich Jews. The second Empire is the restoration of Israel.'

'Monsieur Ishmael a Jew! Not the least in the world,' exclaimed Madame Jarzé. 'He is a good Catholic, and on excellent terms with Father Deguerry, the *curé* of the Madeleine.'

'Then he has one of the noblest of men for his friend. *Au revoir!*' and with curtseys and little friendly speeches, Lady Constance accompanied her departing guests, French fashion, to the hall, where a Diana by Pradier and a dancing faun by Lequesne showed white against a bank of rose-coloured and amber azalias.

'She is positively insufferable,' said Hortense, frowning vindictively, as the mother and her two daughters squeezed themselves into the victoria, which was hired two afternoons a week to take them for an airing in the Bois, and which bore an almost life-like resemblance to a private carriage.

Monsieur Jarzé's official income, albeit augmented by various tributes from complacent tradesmen—tributes which his enemies had been known to stigmatize as bribery and corruption—would not cover the expenses of a Parisian stable.

'I wonder, mamma, that you could be such an idiot as to invite that woman for this evening,' exclaimed Amélie, looking daggers at her parent.

‘My dear child, if I did not get distinguished people occasionally at my Thursdays, my Thursdays would cease to exist. And I only established them for the advantage of my daughters.’

‘And when one of your daughters has the chance of making a great match, you try to burke it by introducing a formidable rival on the scene,’ retorted Amélie.

‘There is no danger. Lady Constance is an Englishwoman—independent, rich, full of prejudices, as proud as Lucifer. She is not at all likely to marry a self-made man who was once a stonemason.’

‘Who knows? One is never sure of anybody or anything.’

CHAPTER XIV.

‘UNTIL THE DAY BREAK AND THE SHADOWS FLEE.’

WHEN Lady Constance Danetree declared her inability to be keenly interested or curious about anything in this life, she was not giving utterance to one of those little affectations with which men and women are apt to interlard their conversation, mere parrot speech, a vague echo caught from a super-refined age, which pretends to have outgrown the faculty of emotion. She spoke the sober truth. A life which from her cradle had given her almost everything she wanted left no margin for wishes or eager curiosity about anything. She had steeped herself in the sunlight of life; she had surrounded herself with the society she liked best; she had travelled, and seen everything she cared to see in civilized Europe. For the vast world beyond, the wilderness and mountain, oceans and mighty rivers, she was content to trust books and photographs, letting her mind

go out amidst that wonder-world in idle day-dreams, and letting other people do the actual work for her. She had stuffed herself with new books, new ideas. She knew four continental languages, and was not obliged to wait till new theories filtered into English literature. She could imbibe them at the fountain head.

Perfect independence, ample means, freedom from all family ties, had made her life different from the lives of other women. She lived faster than others, she never had to wait for her opportunity, to bide her time. She did not say, 'I will go to Rome in November, if I can.' She could do whatever she liked, and had only to say to her major-domo, an accomplished Hanoverian, 'Steinmark, bear in mind that I am to be in Rome on the first of November.' Steinmark heard, remembered, and obeyed. He went three days in advance of his mistress, carrying a certain portion of her luggage. He met her at the railway station, and conducted her to the most perfect set of apartments in the city, where she found her books and her music, her photographs and her basket of crewels, all in their appropriate places in the *salon*. Her journey through life in these golden days of her widowhood was like a

royal progress. Everybody adored her, some for self-interest, many for her own sake, simply because she was adorable.

In Paris her admirers were legion. A beautiful and accomplished Englishwoman, of high birth and ample means, who lived in a charming house and received on a liberal scale, was sure to be popular. People schemed and intrigued to get a card for Lady Constance Danetree’s evenings; and to be seen at one of her little dinners was a *cachet* of good style. Madame Jarzé had laboured, underground like the mole, for a year, before she and her daughters were allowed to cross the threshold of that exquisite villa. It had cost her another six months of coaxing and diplomacy to get Lady Constance to a state dinner—a dinner which made a palpable encroachment upon Monsieur Jarzé’s quarter’s salary; and now, by dint of a pertinacity in polite attentions which touched the confines of impudence, Madame Jarzé and her daughters were able to proclaim themselves among the chosen few—three or four hundred or so—who were Lady Constance Danetree’s intimate friends.

Having promised to go to Madame Jarzé’s party Lady Constance left one of the nicest

houses in the Parc Monceaux, where she had been dining at an early hour, in order to keep her word. She was loyalty itself in small things as well as in large. She went from a choice and intellectual circle regretfully, to be bored in a frivolous crowd; but a promise is sacred, and she knew that there was a high value set upon her presence in the Jarzé household.

The house in which the Jarzés occupied a second floor was a new one, fearfully and wonderfully new; a large and magnificent mansion of which the *rez-de-chaussée* was let to a marquis, the *entre-sol* to an actress, the *premier* to a rich Jew, and the second floor to Monsieur Jarzé, at about half the rent of a house in May Fair. Above this story the inhabitants retrograded in social position, just as the ceilings diminished in height, and the plaster cornices and doorheads decreased in florid ornamentation, till the edifice was crowned by the domesticities of a couple of clerks and their families, and a printer's foreman.

The Jarzé *salon* had an air of chilly elegance, which struck cold to the heart of a stranger newly admitted to its hospitality. The decoration was white and gold, the Louis-Quatorze furniture crimson and gold. A few Sèvres cups and

saucers, a sprinkling of *bibelots*, bonbon-boxes, perfume caskets, photograph albums, were scattered on the gilded tables, and strove to give a home-like air to this abode of plaster of Paris picked out with gold. The crimson-satin curtains were scanty, the chairs were too few, the sofas were hard, the rooms were draughty. A magnificent grand piano was the chief feature of the small inner *salon*. 'A gift from the Empress to my daughters,' said Madame Jarzé to any new acquaintance, pointing to the instrument with her fan. 'A bribe from the maker, who wanted his name introduced at Court,' murmured the initiated.

To-night when the man of all work, with an air that would have done credit to a groom of the chambers, announced Lady Constance Danetree, the rooms were fairly full. People were standing because there were no more chairs on which to sit, a state of things which pleased Madame Jarzé, as it gave the impression of a crowd.

A distinguished violin player was just concluding a scena from Weber's Euryanthe. Lady Constance gave her hand to her hostess without a word.

'You are late; but I knew you would not

disappoint us,' cooed Madame Jarzé, with the accents of a sucking dove; and then, in a still lower voice, she murmured, 'He is here.'

'He? Who?'

She had really forgotten. At the dinner, in a great painter's house, the talk had been of the loftiest, and Constance Danetree's mind had wandered far from the regions of millionaire speculation in bricks and mortar. She had just been reading Schleiermacher's Plato, and they had talked of Greek philosophy and the Greek world.

'Who? Why Monsieur Ishmael. He is in the little *salon* listening to Sinori.'

Constance Danetree turned and looked at the inner *salon*, as at a picture, or a scene on the stage. It was divided by a curtained archway from the larger reception room, and just now the curtain was drawn back, and the pillared arch made a frame for the picture within.

There were only three people in the *salon*. Monsieur Sinori, the violinist, a man of middle age and fine presence, a handsome Italian head, standing by the piano in the light of the candles, with his chin upon his violin, looking down at the varnished wood as a man looks at a sentient thing which he loves with soul and senses alike; Amélie Jarzé, seated in front of the piano, and

looking up at a tall dark man who stood on the other side of the instrument, watching the face of the player, and listening with all his might. This tall dark man was Ishmael—contractor, engineer, speculator, philanthropist, millionaire, and one of the most famous men in Paris.

This is what seventeen years of hard work had done for Raymond Caradec's son.

What other changes had those years brought about—what change in the man himself?

Some change assuredly. Those years, and the responsibilities that had gone along with them, had added dignity to the firm bold brow, with its conquering ridge, and its strongly marked eyebrows above eagle eyes. The carriage of the head was loftier than of old. He had carried his head higher, with the air of a man who for good reason scorns his fellows, ever since his wife abandoned and his friend betrayed him. Such treatment hardens a man, throws him back upon his inner self, develops his sense of his own value. He has been treated like dirt; and he resolves to let the world see that he is not dirt. From the hour of his wife's elopement, fortune followed every act of Ishmael's career. He bore a charm, as it seemed. His

small patrimonial fortune, invested in his own manner, had multiplied a hundredfold. 'The luckiest man in Paris,' men told each other; and they took their schemes and their money to him, and deemed fortune certain, could they but secure his co-operation.

For years he had been a master spirit among men in his own particular line. This sense of mastery—of being always first—had given some touch of kingliness to his aspect, his tone, his manner—something of that look and manner which is seen in famous warriors, in the men who have lived through such nights and days as that of Waterloo or the battle of the Sutlej, men who have fought like Clive or marched like Roberts. Peace has its victories as well as war—its trials—its defeats.

Ishmael had stood on the bank of the Seine in the gray of a winter dawn to see a mighty railway bridge, the work of a year, snapped asunder, crumbled to ruin—work fresh from the builder's hand, as a sovereign from the mint: a catastrophe meaning the loss of nine or ten million francs to the contractor.

'Well, my friends,' he said with a long drawn sigh, and his hands deep in his pockets; 'we must begin it all again.'

And next day came the counter-balance, some stroke of luck which paid for the bridge.

A man with such a history seems as much out of place at a tea party in the Champs Elysées as a lion in an aviary; but Ishmael bore himself easily enough as he leant across the piano, and watched the face of the violin player.

‘Delicious,’ he said, drawing a long breath when the last pianissimo chord died into silence. ‘How you must enjoy playing like that, Monsieur Sinori.’

Sinori smiled upon him, pleased at the *naïve* compliment.

‘Weber and my Straduarius understand each other,’ he answered quietly, putting the violin into its case.

Amélie’s hands began to wander over the keys, and finally settled into ‘Dites lui,’ played with melting tenderness, while eyes of bewitching blue glanced shyly upward at the millionaire, from the covert of fluffy golden hair.

But the pretty glance, the languishing melody, were thrown away upon Ishmael. Perhaps he had had just a little too much of innocent childish beauty in his youth. The highly trained daughter of the second Empire could never seem as childlike or as free from

guile as Pâquerette had seemed in those days of the rue Sombreuil; or if she could, her infantine graces would have served only to recall the one great horror of Ishmael's life.

'How well Schneider sings that song,' he said coolly, as he turned from the piano.

'I want to present you to Lady Constance Danetree,' said Madame Jarzé, approaching him at this moment.

There was a clear space, diameter of a yard or so, in the middle of the *salon*: and here the two great people met, while society, represented chiefly by elegant nobodies, looked on and admired.

They met as royalties meet, a king and queen among men and women, each taller by half a head than the majority of the men and women around them—each with an air of nobility which dominated the crowd. Constance's perfect figure and grand style of beauty were set off by the rich simplicity of her toilet—a gown of dark brown velvet, innocent of a vestige of trimming, save the narrow Valenciennes tucker gathered tightly round the marble shoulders by a slim thread of gold. A collet necklace of matchless Brazilian diamonds encircled the round full throat, and this was

the only jewel which relieved the sombre richness of the lady's costume.

'*Comme elle est fagotée !* How odd that no Englishwomen knows how to dress !' murmured Hortense behind her fan, to the author of 'Mes Râles,' who was sitting by her side in the embrasure of a window.

'I think you should exclude Lady Constance Danetree from that sweeping condemnation,' said the Vicomte languidly. 'That brown velvet is full of voluptuous lights and shadows, and with such arms and shoulders a woman should never wear anything but darkest velvet. For the fragile and the attenuated'—with a glance at Hortense's thin arms enveloped in clouds of tulle, 'a more airy style is admirable ; but statuesque beauty requires solid treatment.'

'I hate solidity,' retorted Hortense. 'To my mind grace consists in curves and undulating movements.'

The Vicomte smiled blandly.

'You, who are the very spirit of grace, have a right to be critical.'

He rewarded his slave with a civil little speech now and then—though his general tone was as impassive as that of a braminical cow—just as a man throws an occasional biscuit to a dog that persistently fawns upon him.

The millionaire and the Englishwoman talked to each other a little, about nothing particular, as newly-introduced people talk, with only the faintest interest, neither knowing of what manner of conversation the other is capable. Nothing in Constance Danetree's manner betrayed that her mind had undergone a shock of any kind within the last five minutes. Not the faintest elevation of her eyebrows indicated surprise. Yet she had been as much astonished since her entrance into that room as ever she had been in her life.

Ishmael was in every way the opposite of the man she expected to see. She was a woman full of prejudices, and there was a class of people for which she had a special detestation. She hated self-educated men, and she hated self-made millionaires. The former she had always found intolerable in their assumption of intellectual superiority to all the rest of the world, the latter odious in their pride of wealth. She had been bored by people's praise of Ishmael, the great contractor—the man to whom the Parisian workman owed his new boulevards, his palatial barracks, planned with a novel regard for sanitation; the man to whom the very fourfooted beasts were

debtors for the boon of being slaughtered under comfortable conditions; the man whose acumen had been a great factor in the improvement of hospital architecture all over France; and the man who was reported to have done more philanthropic work on his own account and in his own quiet way, than any other man who had won fortune under the second Empire.

Lady Constance heard all, believed all—too indifferent indeed for disbelief—and made her own mind-picture of the great contractor.

A short thick-set man, of course—contractors were always built squat, she believed—a man with shaggy light-coloured eyebrows, cunning gray eyes, a large sensual mouth, and a heavy jowl; a purseproud man undoubtedly, given to bragging of the great things he had done for himself and the world; an ignorant man, knowing hardly anything outside his own uninteresting business; a *bon vivant*, no doubt, giving himself the airs of a *gourmet* on the strength of newly-acquired wealth, finding fault with the *bisque* at other people’s dinners, and protesting that there were only three men in Paris who could cook a *suprême de volaille*—a man moreover with the stamp of his origin

upon him in the shape of the carpenter's thumb.

And behold, instead of the short squat person, with bristling pepper-and-salt eyebrows, she saw standing before her a man of six feet two, with darkest brows and flashing eyes, the features of a Roman warrior—a man who looked well under forty years of age.

She measured him from head to foot as he talked to her, with a calm and cold survey; yet her heart beat just a thought faster on account of her surprise. For the first time in her life she felt that she had been a prejudiced self-opinionated fool. If a contractor could be such a person as this, why object to contractors?

‘Women are fools,’ she thought, shifting the blame from herself to the sex in general. ‘We are always jumping at conclusions, always mistaking our own fancies for absolute facts.’

She stole a glance at his right hand. Yes, there was the mark of the beast. The thumb was too square and solid to belong to a gentleman's hand. And then she looked at Pontchartrain, whose white effeminate fingers dangled across the elbow of his crimson satin chair, and from the hand looked at the small bald head, the slim narrow figure.

‘What a rat the creature looks beside this master-builder!’ she thought; ‘and yet I have no doubt he looks down upon the man who once handled a mason’s hammer.’

She tried to imagine the man to whom she was talking, clad in a blouse, hewing stone, labouring among other labourers; but picture him however she pleased, she could only see him as a king among men. Nobody had told her that there was good blood in his veins. That tradition of a noble origin died out among Ishmael’s fellow-workmen by the time he had been three years in Paris. The Parisian world knew him only as the architect of his own fortunes.

The dining-room doors were flung open presently, and Madame Jarzé’s guests strolled in to refresh themselves at a buffet where a *thé à l’Anglaise*, with sandwiches, *petits fours*, inoffensive syrups, and a little Bordeaux, were arranged with an elegance which gave an air of luxury at a very small outlay. Ishmael stood beside Lady Constance while she sipped a cup of inoffensive tea. Amélie floated about the room, offering a casket of *pralines* and *marrons glacés* to her mother’s guests, while Hortense plied her poet with red-currant syrup and sweet

cakes, imploring him to make people happy before they departed by the recitation of one of his '*Râles*.'

'They are not intended to be declaimed in a *salon*,' objected Pontchartrain, who liked nothing better than to inflict his verses upon society. 'People come here in the right mood to hear the scraping of catgut, but not to listen to the cry of a human heart.'

'Indeed you are mistaken. Monsieur Sinori's playing has just put people in tune for true poetry—that exquisite melody of Weber's, so weird, so strange.'

Pontchartrain gave her a withering look.

'I am sorry you have not yet discovered the difference between a fiddler and a poet,' he said, while the kind dark face of the Italian, who was sipping a *sorbet* on the other side of the table, smiled at them across the cups and saucers, unconscious of the Vicomte's depreciation.

'If you would only give us that too pathetic little poem, "*La prière d'un fagot*." Let me see, now: how does it begin? "*Ecrasez moi, O Dieu*."'

'You like those lines,' said the Vicomte, relenting from his severity, and turning his tarnished eyeballs upon the damsel with a

gratified look. ‘Yes; I think that prayer of the galley-slave is worth a hecatomb of your *fade* love songs, your pious ineptitudes, your *patatras* of angels and children, and grand-mammas and grandpapas.’

And then between his clenched teeth, frowning darkly the while, he mumbled his own verses:—

‘O, toi ! qui, dans mon cœur, n’excitas que démente,
Que me sert ta pitié, que me fait ta clémence,
Frappe sans plus tarder celui qui te maudit,
Ecrase et foudroie.’

‘You will recite those grand lines for us, will you not?’ pleaded Hortense.

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders and elevated his eyebrows, with the air of a man who yields to the inexorable frivolity of his surroundings.

‘If my recitation can possibly interest any one,’ he muttered, with a supercilious glance at the company.

‘It will delight us all. Monsieur le Vicomte is going to recite something when we go back to the *salon*,’ announced Hortense triumphantly.

People gave the usual murmur of suppressed rapture, and the pleasures of the table being by this time fairly exhausted, the majority returned to

the *salon*, leaving a privileged minority to take their ease, and light their cigarettes with Monsieur Jarzé, a stout inoffensive person who had never had a will of his own since his marriage. The dining-room doors being closed upon these sybarites, Monsieur Pontchartrain took his stand in the centre of the *salon* beside a gilded *guéridon*, upon which the thoughtful Hortense had placed a glass of water.

He scraped his throat once or twice, plunged his right hand in his waistcoat, played with his watch chain with the left, looked first downwards at his neat little varnished boots, then upwards at the ceiling, and then in a deep and altogether artificial voice—his natural tones inclining to a nasal treble—he began the prayer of the galley-slave, the *forçat* of Toulon, broiling and toiling under a copper sky, scorned and hated of men, forgotten of God.

Needless to say that the ‘fagot’s’ prayer was one long blasphemy, that he reviled his Creator in every line, that the whole poem reeked with the foulest atheism, and was in perfect harmony with the new French school—a curious mixture of slang and sublimity, pathos and bathos, Victor Hugo and Villon, Rabelais and Voltaire. The Vicomte, with his eyes on the ceiling, and his

organ tones sinking ever and anon into an inaudible groan, declaimed his verses with an intense solemnity, a profound belief in their power to inspire awe and horror; and when at last this voice melted by a gradual diminuendo into silence, he looked round the room, with the air of giving his audience permission to breathe again. There were more murmurs, which might mean anything in the world, and which did for the most part mean sincere gratification at the thing being over.

‘Is that your idea of poetry, Madame?’ asked Ishmael, still standing beside Lady Constance Danetree.

‘I freely confess that it is not,’ answered Constance; ‘but there is a fashion in literature, just as there is in gowns and bonnets, and these horrors are the novelty of the day. It is the school of Baudelaire and his Flowers of Evil.’

‘And such men as these hope to fill the place of Alfred de Musset,’ said Ishmael.

‘You admire Musset?’ she asked, wondering that there should be room for the love of poetry in the mind of a master of figures and mechanics.

‘Yes. He is not a cheerful poet, but he has given me at least distraction of mind in many a gloomy hour.’

‘And in your life—which I imagine must have been full of business anxieties—you could really find time for poetry?’

‘Why not? The man who works hardest at facts and figures has most need of an occasional excursion into the unreal world. There is always the longing for an oasis in the desert of dull realities.’

It was growing late, and Madame Jarzé’s guests were dispersing. Lady Constance had intended only to spend half an hour in the Jarzé *salon*—to keep her word to her hostess and no more. She had stayed nearly two hours’ and the time had seemed to her as nothing. Ishmael accompanied her down the broad stone staircase with its sumptuous carpet and gilded bannisters, its architectural doors, surmounted by plaster of Paris cupidons and festoons of flowers moulded by machinery, after the school of Jean Goujon. The actress’s door on the *entresol* was ajar, and there came from within a ripple of laughter, a murmur of well-bred masculine voices, and a cheerful clinking of glass and silver, as Lady Constance and her companion passed. The actress was altogether *comme-il-faut*, or she would not have been allowed to inhabit that temple of the respect-

abilities ; but even the most correct of actresses must have supper after the play, and cannot always sup alone, nor is a little game of baccarat, played quietly within closed doors, an offence against society.

Ishmael saw Lady Constance to her carriage.

‘I have very little way to go,’ she said, as she bade him good-night ; ‘only just on the other side of the arch.’

During their leisurely descent of the staircase she had been wondering a little that he did not seize the opportunity to ask permission to call upon her. She was generally beset by people who craved that privilege after the briefest acquaintance, people whose requests she granted with the feelings of a martyr ; but here was a man in whom she felt really interested, an exceptional man, as Madame Jarzé had said, and he held his peace.

Perhaps she made that little remark about the locality of her abode in order to give him an opportunity. But he took no advantage of her kindness.

‘Do you live in this part of Paris?’ she asked.

‘No, I have an old house in the Place Royale.’

‘How curious! Do you really care for old houses—you who have built so many new ones?’

‘Perhaps it is for that reason I love the old. One gets weary of the sameness of modern Parisian houses—white, and cold, and dazzling—too small for a palace, too big for a home. My old panelled rooms in the Place Royale have a homely look that I like.’

‘But are they not too large for a bachelor?’

‘Not too large for my books.’

‘You have a library then?’ asked Constance, unconsciously supercilious.

She could not help feeling surprised at any evidence of refinement in a man who had begun his career as a journeyman stonemason.

‘I have been collecting books for the last eighteen years—they are my chief companions—they mark the stages of my life, are a calendar of the years that are gone. You could never imagine how full of eloquence even the backs of them are for their owner.’

‘How interesting to collect in that way—slowly—from year to year—instead of ordering a library *en bloc*!’ said Constance.

Had she set herself to imagine a millionaire-contractor’s library she would have pictured a

lofty and spacious room, with carved bookcases and classic busts to order, and a gorgeous array of Purgold or Bozerian bindings, contents selected by the bookseller. And it seemed that this man valued books for their own sake, and had chosen them for himself, one by one. Truly a strange man after his kind.

'Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

They shook hands through the carriage window, almost like old friends, and the brougham drove off towards the archway, white and pure in the March moonbeams, sculptured with victories that were past and gone, telling of a time more heroic even than those golden years of the second Empire. And they too were gone with the snows of last winter, and France drooped her Imperial head ever so little, bowed with a growing sense of impotence. Had she not pledged herself to established an Empire *là bas* between the two Americas, and had she not failed ignominiously? Had she not been warned off the premises by the United States, bidden to depart with her army and its baggage, lest a worse thing should befall her? And she had been fooled by William and Bismarck, and she was ill-friends

with Italy. Truly the glory of Israel had departed—and Ichabod was the word written, in mystic characters that only the wise could read, on yonder triumphal gate.

Lady Constance leant back in her brougham with a sigh, not for the vanishing splendours of the Empire, but with a faint vague sense of disappointment. She had seen this millionaire about whom everybody had been plaguing her for the last six months, and she had been told again and again by Madame Jarzé that he had long desired to meet her. And they had met, and they had parted, without a word of any future meeting on his part. Could it be that for once in her life Lady Constance had failed to make a favourable impression upon a stranger of the opposite sex? Never before had such a thing happened to her. It would be, if this were so, an utterly new experience: new, and in some wise, unpleasant. Women accustomed to universal worship miss the incense, albeit they may affect to despise the votive herd. And here was a man unlike the herd, and therefore interesting: and he had seen her, and evidently cared not a jot if he never saw her again.

And yet on their first introduction, when

their eyes met, and their glances seemed to mingle in sudden light and warmth—mingle as two gases meet and take fire—then it had seemed to her as if for both of them that first meeting was an electric shock, a surprise, a revelation, a recognition, almost. As if they two had from the very beginning of things been doomed so to meet, so to kindle into flame.

‘What, is it *you*?’ his eyes had seemed to say.

And he let her go, without so much as the commonplace request for permission to call upon her.

Was he shy—*gauche*—at a loss how to act, from sheer ignorance of the conventionalities of daily life? She thought not. His manners were self-possessed and easy. He was grave, but not reserved. He spoke of himself freely, seemed in no wise disturbed by the sense of her superior rank. He had not made any attempt to continue the acquaintance, simply because he was in no hurry to see her again. Of course if he pleased he could get Madame Jarzé to take him to the villa in the Bois; but that would seem a circuitous way of approaching a lady who had shown herself sufficiently gracious to be approached more directly.

'I daresay he is wrapped up in his bridges and viaducts, and detests women's society,' Constance told herself, as she drew her furred mantle closer round her, before alighting at her own door.

It was a matter upon which a person of Constance Danetree's calm temperament might have been supposed incapable of wasting five minutes' thought; and yet when her maid had been dismissed she sat before the fire in her dressing-room staring at the smouldering logs, and brooding upon this frivolous question half through the night. She knew that it would be useless to lie down. Sleep was impossible for a brain on fire. She sat till the dark restful night-hours were well-nigh spent; sat with her slippered feet on the fender, her Indian silk dressing-gown wrapped carelessly round her, her hair coiled in a loose knot at the back of her head, pale, grave, like a sibyl reading the book of fate, as written in flickering flame and falling embers. What was it, what did it mean, this sudden fever, never felt before—this persistency of the mind in dwelling upon one subject, this monotony of the fancy which would picture only one face—that dark Roman face, with the lambent flame in the eyes, those grave lips, shaded but not

hidden by the thick black moustache? What was it, this sudden possession taken of her soul—by a man whose face she had not seen six hours ago? Six hours ago and she would have passed him in the street, unrecognised, unnoticed. And now, because they two had met and looked into each other's eyes, and talked to each other for a little while upon the most indifferent subjects, she could not banish him out of her mind for a moment. His image possessed her, mastered her fancy, filled her thoughts. He was there, at her side, as she sat by the fire. His presence was almost as real in the strength of her ardent fancy, as if he had been there in the flesh. She wondered where, how soon they would meet again. Her imagination began to picture possible meetings; her fancy painted the scene of their *rencontre*, lighted it with the dazzle of sunshine, or the soft radiance of moonbeams—spoke for him, spoke for her—eloquent, spiritual, touching the confines of passion, breathing of unavowed love. And all this for a man she had met for the first time only six hours ago!

What did it all mean? Could it be the thing she had read of in novels, and smiled at for its foolishness, its impossibility? Could it be

love at first sight—love given unsought, unasked, for a man who had once worked as a common stone-mason? Bah! the idea was revolting.

A moment of scorn, a movement of indignation at her own folly, a sudden drawing up of the proud head. 'I will think of the man no more.'

And then, in the next instant, the statuesque throat drooped again, the rounded chin sank on the womanly breast, and the eyes gazed dreamily into the dying fire.

'I have wondered ever since I was a girl if I should ever know what love meant,' she thought. 'Has it come at last?'

A pause, and then a sudden light in the lovely eyes.

'Yes, it has come—it is here—and for good or evil I bid the stranger welcome.'

CHAPTER XV.

‘MY BELOVED IS MINE, AND I AM HIS.’

THE great circular show in the Champ de Mars was officially opened on the appointed first of April, but that wonderful fairy palace about which people had been talking all the winter first revealed itself to society amidst a chaotic confusion of planks, canvas, scaffolding, and workpeople of all kinds. Those Moorish palaces, Chinese pavilions, restaurants, cafés, drinking bars of the outermost circle—which were afterwards to become more famous, more popular, than all the wonders of art and science in the main building—existed at this period only in the imagination of official journalists, who went into raptures about splendours which were as yet only to be seen on paper. In a biting east wind, and amidst the clinking of hammers, the hurrying to and fro of workmen, the Imperial trio—Emperor, Empress, and fair young Prince—appeared, and

the exhibition was declared open. But there was no Imperial speech. The Luxembourg question made a little cloud in the political horizon at this period ; while there was a thick darkness yonder over the volcanic soil of Mexico. Not a happy time for Imperial eloquence by any means : so the world's show was opened in discreet silence, save for that clinking of hammers.

Lady Constance Danetree, having very few interests in life, was naturally among the first to visit the newly-opened building. She was not enthusiastic about exhibitions, having seen several, and declaring that she had been bored to death by the great exhibition of sixty-two, which had seemed to her a terrible falling off from the crystal palace of her childhood, the fairy scene in Hyde Park—flags flying, trees growing, fountains springing—all under the glittering glass roof. Yes, she had been a child then, full of capacity for delight ; and in sixty-two she was a young woman, leaning on her newly-wedded husband's arm. And now in sixty-seven she declared that she was getting old, and cared not a straw for all the wonderful things that could be brought from the four corners of the earth.

But in Paris Lady Constance found she must do a good many things to please other people; or else take a great deal of trouble in saying no. It was sometimes less trouble to consent than to refuse. The Jarzés, who insisted upon being her intimate friends, self-elected to that office, plagued her to go to the exhibition with them on the first day, and rather than be disobliging she agreed to go.

There was a vague hope—a faint suggestion of her fancy—which made the idea of that early visit pleasanter than it would otherwise have been. Was it not likely that he—Ishmael—a man keenly interested in all practical things, would be among the earliest visitors? If he were there the place was so gigantic that the odds against meeting him would be tremendous. But he *might* be there, and they *might* meet; and even this gave zest to the business, and put Constance in good humour. She asked the Jarzés to breakfast on the first of April, and was in excellent spirits during the meal—served with an ideal elegance, prepared by an ideal cook—a natural result of ample means, and ample leisure for making the best use of money.

‘I wonder whether your friend Monsieur

Ishmael will be at the exhibition to day?' she said carelessly, as they drove from the door.

The east wind was blowing, the sky was dull and gray, but the mere thought that they two might meet, steeped the world in warmth and sun-light.

Amélie looked at her intently for an instant, with a much keener gaze than one would expect from a *petite frimousse chiffonnée*, under a cloud of pale gold hair.

'Monsieur Ishmael is just the last person I expect to meet in the exhibition,' she said, 'for I think his interest in the place must be exhausted by this time. He is a privileged person, and has been allowed to explore the works as often as he liked. Indeed I believe he was consulted about the plan of the building, and has watched the growth of it from the very first.'

Madame Jarzé smiled approvingly at her younger daughter.

'Monsieur Ishmael and my Amélie are fast friends,' she said. 'It is strange what an interest the dear child takes in great engineering works. I found her the other day puzzling her poor little brain over a tremendous book on canals.'

'There are times when one sickens of a life

made up of *chiffons*,’ said Amélie, with a sentimental air.

‘When is that, I wonder?’ asked Hortense contemptuously. ‘When your dressmaker refuses to trust you for any more gowns, or when you have been short of partners at a ball?’

‘Amélie never has any lack of partners,’ said the mother indignantly.

Madame Jarzé and her elder hope lived in a kind of armed neutrality. The day had been when Hortense was paraded everywhere, dressed, praised, petted, as a daughter whose early and brilliant marriage must inevitably do honour to the house of Jarzé; but when chance after chance was lost, and Hortense began to grow thin and hollow-cheeked, the mother lost faith in this first venture, and concentrated all her hopes upon the second. True that Hortense was handsome: years ago she had ranked as the beauty-daughter, and Amélie had been left to pine in the background. Hortense had large dark eyes, a classic profile; while Amélie’s *retroussé* nose and large mouth, light gray eyes and plump figure were *bourgeoise* to the last degree. But as time went on Hortense’s complexion grew sallow, the classic profile sharpened to severity, the thin lips became almost

pallid, the dark eyes assumed a gloomy look ; while, on the other hand, *ces dames* had brought *retroussé* noses, large mouths, and plump figures into fashion—the little *minois chiffonné*, the King Charles' spaniel style of face, set off by a cloud of fluffy yellow hair, became the rage—and Amélie was admired ; while Hortense, with her air of Madame Roland about to ascend the scaffold, was left to wither in the cold shade of absolute neglect. Amélie had made an exhaustive study of the airs and graces of *ces dames*, whom she saw daily in the Bois, and nightly at opera or theatre ; and upon this popular style she had founded and fashioned her own beauty. The neutral-tinted hair became a golden yellow ; the pencilled eyebrows gave piquancy by their dark firm line ; the large full lips were accentuated with carmine, and the plump figure was laced and moulded into the fashionable form. In a word, Amélie was as like Cora as it was possible for her to be under existing conditions. The Court official, elderly and half-blind, stared at the dazzling apparition and wondered—nay, even went so far on one occasion as to ask his wife if Amélie's style of dress was quite respectable ; but at the very next ball at the Tuileries the Empress herself graciously

informed him that Mademoiselle Amélie was much more attractive than her elder sister—suspected of an Orleanist bias—and that his younger daughter was *chic*, all that there is of the most *chic*.

‘Oh,’ thought Monsieur Jarzé, ‘then that is *chic*? I am glad I know what *chic* means.’

Lady Constance leant back in her carriage with a weary air. All her interest in the exhibition had vanished in a breath. The whole thing became a nuisance. These Jarzés with their unpleasant idiosyncracies, their half-concealed antagonisms: why had she ever permitted herself to associate with such people? That younger girl had obviously dyed her hair and painted her eyebrows: a creature of hardly twenty years of age. Hortense was as obviously malignant. They were like a pair of wicked sisters in a fairy tale. And to know such people, and to go about with them, only for lack of the moral courage to shut one’s door in their faces! But society is made so.

This was the drift of Lady Constance Dane-tree’s thoughts as her carriage crossed the river and drew up at the entrance to the exhibition, amidst a confusion of dependencies and out-buildings, in the course of erection, waggons

disgorging their contents, packing-cases, diggers and delvers laying out the ground-plans of future gardens, labourers groaning as they carried the tanks for the future aquarium.

Within, all was in an embryo state, like a first rehearsal of a pantomime? Lady Constance and her friends went about looking with a cursory air at everything, hardly seeing anything. The whole business had all at once become flat, stale, and unprofitable, to a woman spoiled by unbroken prosperity, and in search of strong emotions.

Three weeks ago a strong emotion had come upon her unawares, like a galvanic shock; and she had been living on the memory of that feeling ever since. She despised herself for this strange weakness of a strong nature, never having realised the fact that the strongest natures are most prone to such aberrations. That she, Constance Danetree, the courted and admired, could allow her fancy to be touched, her deepest feelings awakened by a stranger, a man of whom she knew nothing definite except the one galling fact that he had begun his career as a common labourer. To such a man, unsought, she had surrendered her thoughts, her dreams, her peace of mind—she, the daughter of one of the proudest peers in Ireland. What was it—magic

—madness—or only the folly that comes of a life given over to frivolous amusements—a life without high aim, or unselfish purpose? She told herself that this humiliation, this bitter sense of being mastered by a foolish fancy, was the natural outcome of the life she had led since her husband's death—a life of self-indulgence, days and nights consumed in fashionable dissipation, a going to and fro over the earth, allowing her beauty to be praised by idle lips, accepting the flatteries of the insincere, living the hollow artificial life of an advanced civilization, a world tending towards its fall.

Philosophise as she might, the fact remained. For the coming of this man whom she had seen but once in her life, she longed as ardently as Juliet longed for the advent of Romeo.

‘And I have always despised Juliet,’ thought Constance. ‘Neither her youth nor her Italian temperament could excuse her in my eyes. And yet, ten years Juliet's senior, I am as romantic and impressionable as she.’

Three weeks ago she had found some excuse for her folly in the thought that the awakening of feeling had been as mutual as it was sudden. Instinct had told her that Ishmael's heart had answered beat for beat to the strong pulses of

her own. They had spoken together only as strangers speak, but there are looks and tones untranslatable in words, and yet fraught with deepest meanings to the keen apprehension of a sensitive woman. Had her instinct and her apprehension utterly deceived her on this one occasion of her life? Hitherto she had been so quick to perceive, that she had the reputation of a kind of clairvoyance; and now in this crisis of her life, when unknown depths of feeling were mysteriously troubled, as the sacred pool by the angel, her powers of clairvoyance all at once deserted her, and she was as much at sea as a schoolgirl.

Nearly three weeks had passed since that March night when they two had met, and Ishmael had made no sign. It would have been so easy for him to contrive a second meeting. A man in his position, courted, worshipped almost for the sake of that wealth which everywhere means powers—such a man was master of the situation. He had but to hint a wish and his desire would be realised. A million of money is the modern realisation of Aladdin's lamp, which may have been an allegory intended to foreshadow the advent of silver kings, pill-makers, and great contractors.

Ishmael had not brought about a second *rencontre*; therefore he had no desire to see Lady Constance Danetree again. This was what the lady had in her mind as she strolled listlessly in the outer circle, where the machinery was exhibited, and stifled a yawn as she listened to Madame Jarzé’s complaint that the building offered no *coup d’œil*.

‘Stupendous—immense—but no *coup d’œil*.’

And in the next moment a grave baritone voice was asking her what she thought of the exhibition, and her gloved hand was in the grasp of that strong hand with the mark of the beast, the carpenter’s thumb. The whole scene was transformed in an instant, like a change in a stage decoration, and this outer circle of steam-engines, pistons, pulleys, model ships, model locomotives, ice-making, iron-cutting, potato-peeling machinery, which she had just denounced as hideous and revolting, became all at once full of interest.

‘Will you show us some of the model bridges, and explain them to us,’ asked Amélie, with the air of an intelligent child of nine or ten. ‘I have been reading about canals and bridges lately.’

Ishmael smiled upon her benignantly, just as he might have smiled at the intelligent child.

‘What, Mademoiselle; do you ever read?’ he exclaimed. ‘I thought you only cared for theatres, balls, races, pleasure of all kinds.’

‘There comes a time when one grows weary of pleasure,’ said Amélie.

‘Ah, but *you* have not come to that time. However, I shall be charmed to be your cicerone among the models. They are a little in my line. Did you see the iron-plated men-of-war, as you came in? There are some very good models of suspension bridges a little way on—but everything is chaotic at present.’

He led the way, pointing out things as they passed—American ‘Monitors,’ turret ships, rams, floating batteries, transports with accommodation for four or five hundred horses. He stopped now and again to explain some curious piece of machinery, a monster locomotive for instance, with ten wheels and a horizontal chimney. The rods and cranks and wheels which had seemed a meaningless monotony of steel and iron a few minutes before, became at his voice instinct with meaning, and almost as full of individuality as if they had been living creatures. He told them about the Nasmyth hammer, which Lady Constance had hitherto supposed to be some handy little patent for

knocking in tin tacks without hurting ones fingers. He showed them cannon of different orders, and told them the secrets of those dark bores which on the field of battle were as the mouths of devils, vomiting death and destruction.

Constance listened silently, drinking in every tone of the deep musical voice. Strange that the tone should be so completely that of gentle blood and good breeding. Had the millionaire learned to speak as Monsieur Jourdain learned to fence—after he had made his fortune? She had believed hitherto that there was no more certain indication of man’s origin than the sound of his voice; and yet here was a lowly born mechanic with accents as pure and true as one could hear from a Condé or a Grammont. It was pleasant to listen even to the dry-as-dust details of a suspension bridge from such a fine organ. Constance stood by and listened with delight, while Ishmael explained the plan of the bridge at Fribourg in Switzerland, and of the tubular bridge over the Menai Straits, across which she had so often been carried, indolently lolling in the corner of a railway carriage, without a thought as to how the thing was done.

Somehow or other—Lady Constance could not have told how it came about—she found herself and Ishmael a little in advance of the rest, after they had all seen the bridges. He had taken the opportunity of an encounter between Madame Jarzé and some friends to leave that lady and her two daughters a little in the rear, while he led Constance onward through the wonder-world of mechanism. Amélie came hurrying after them presently—gushing—infantine—like the last *ingénue* in the last comedy at the Gymnase—‘wanting to know, you know,’ saying silly things of malice aforethought, with the idea that to be silly is the surest way to fascinate a serious and practical man. Ishmael shook himself free from her as if she had been a bur. He addressed his conversation exclusively to Lady Constance; whereupon Amélie was constrained to console herself with the society of two feeble specimens of gilded youth who had been wandering all over the building in search of a *buvette* where they could get some *absinthe*, and were in despair at having discovered no such oasis in the desert of art and science.

‘The papers said there was to be everything in the exhibition, and there is absolutely

nothing,' complained one of these *petits crevés*, small, pale, inclining to baldness, and with an air of latent phthisis, after the manner of the species.

'And where in the name of heaven is Spier and Ponds?' cried the other. 'We were told to expect a perfect paradise from Spier and Ponds.'

'It seems they are not arrived yet,' said Madame Jarzé. 'Hardly anything is completed—the kiosks, the model houses, the mosque, the aquarium, all the things we have heard so much about—not arrived. The exhibition will not be worth looking at till June.'

With Ishmael for her guide, Lady Constance Danetree made an exhaustive round of the building and its exterior appurtenances. The place had been his recreation ground for the last six months. He had been there every day, watching, advising, with quick eye and active brain. He was hand in glove with the builders; he made friends with strangers from afar—Yankees, Californians, purveyors of ready-made houses from Chicago, Norwegians, Icelanders, dwellers in the Indian Archipelago and the South Seas. He knew the place by heart, and it was delightful to Constance to see and

understand these practical elements of life under his guidance, as she had never seen or understood before. She remembered how at South Kensington in sixty-two she and her husband had idly strolled about the huge building, looking in a trivial way at this and at that, Gibson's tinted Venus, the singing bird from Switzerland, Rimmel's perfumed fountain—here a jewel, and there a piece of furniture—shunning the machinery courts as if they were infected—pleased with the picture-galleries, still better pleased at chance meetings with friends, interminable gossip and chatter—leaving the mighty show without one definite idea added to their scanty stock of knowledge.

Poor Mark never could interest himself in anything that did not go on four legs, she thought, remembering her husband's passion for horses and dogs, and how his conversation, starting from whatever point, always harked back to stable or kennel.

It was growing dusk when—after losing her party three or four times—she found them again near the door by which they had all entered.

'I never was so tired of anything in my life,' said Madame Jarzé, utterly exhausted by

the fatigue of the show, and by the little disagreeables of family intercourse.

‘Strange,’ exclaimed Constance. ‘I who am generally bored to death by exhibitions, find this one full of interest.’

She shook hands with Ishmael before she got into her carriage—frankly—cordially—with a happy look in those violet-gray eyes, a look which gave a new glory to their loveliness. She was on the point of asking him to call on her some day with his friends the Jarzés, but changed her mind in an instant, as shy as a girl.

‘He will come of his own accord,’ she thought, for, like a chorus keeping time with the quickened beating of her heart, went the words, ‘I know he loves me.’ She smiled at him as she took her seat in her barouche. Her eyes were shining on him like sunlight in the gray dull afternoon, as he stood bareheaded, watching the carriage drive away through the keen piercing wind.

She was to drop the Jarzés on her way home. The thorough-bred grays started at a sharp trot, and swept along the quay, across the Pont de l’Alma, up the broad avenue into the Champs Élysées.

Madame Jarzé drew her velvet mantle round

her with a vehement shiver, while Hortense and Amélie, with their backs to the horses, huddled together under the large black wolf-skin rug. 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.' To Constance Danetree the atmosphere seemed balmy.

'I wonder that you can drive in an open carriage in such weather,' said Madame Jarzé complainingly—base ingratitude on her part, since the use of her friend's barouche saved her the cost of a hired vehicle: her *victoria de remise* being chartered only for two hours on Mondays and Thursdays.

'I love the open air,' replied Constance, with the grand manner of a being who could never be cold, whose veins were filled with divine ichor, not with common human blood that curdles and makes gooseflesh at the slightest provocation.

'I had no idea you had a passion for machinery,' said Amélie, pallid with disappointment, anger, jealousy, envy, half the seven deadly sins, and a few of the smaller ones thrown in. Her painted lips quivered, and their false bloom made her pallor seem more ghastly.

'Nor had I until this afternoon,' answered Constance easily. 'But the driest subject becomes interesting when explained by a clever man.'

‘Especially when he is not a gray-headed doddering old professor with green spectacles and a red cotton handkerchief, but a man still in the prime of life, handsome, striking, altogether exceptional,’ pursued Amélie.

‘That certainly makes the whole business more agreeable,’ replied Constance.

She perfectly understood Amélie’s drift, and perceived that she had a rival—a rival to the very death—in this young lady with baby-airs and baby-graces, turned-up nose, and flossy golden hair. But she was not going to be discomfited by a chit. Perhaps, woman as she was, secure in the consciousness of superior beauty, superior accomplishments, even this petty rivalry added a new zest to love.

‘I hope we shall see you next Thursday evening,’ said Madame Jarzé as the carriage stopped at the door of the Champs Élysées caravansera, with its gigantic pediment, supported by caryatides in Caen stone.

‘Pray come. Monsieur Ishmael will be with us, and can give you another lecture on suspension bridges,’ said Amélie.

Constance wavered before replying. What if this were her only chance of meeting him again in the next ten days, and she let it go: just as

if a parched traveller in the desert should spill the one cup of water which was to refresh and comfort him? No, this time she told herself the thing was certain. He loved her. She had looked into his eyes, once and once only, unawares, as they two stood on each side of a cannon in the exhibition yonder, and she had read the thought of his brain, the impulse of his heart, in those dark earnest eyes. She knew that he loved her. And this being so, it was for her to be sought, not to seek. Not for worlds would she lay plans for meeting him, waylay him as it were. Her duty to herself involved the strictest reserve.

‘You are very good,’ she said. ‘I am full of engagements for Thursday. I’m afraid this is going to be a desperately gay season.’

Amélie gave an impatient little sigh. Alas ! she thought, what it is to be born in the purple ! There were dinners and balls to which Lady Constance Danetree was bidden at which Monsieur Jarzé’s daughters could not hope to appear ; and even at those parties to which they were invited there was always the harassing question of toilet, the agonising doubt as to whether their gowns were good enough for the occasion, whether the *parure* of flowers, picked

out petal by petal, pinched and repinched by delicate fingers for an industrious hour, did not after all look tumbled, faded, second-hand, amidst the freshness of *garnitures* that had been sent from the milliner’s half an hour before the fête. That rage for luxury and fine dress which began with the second Empire and which has been growing ever since, and which rages more furiously than ever after fourteen years of Republican rule, was the cause of many a heart-burning to women of mediocre fortunes. It was the wives and daughters of those days who drove the men upon the Stock Exchange, flung them—hands tied—into the bottomless gulf of speculation, the Tophet of chicanery. The daughters of that time were as the daughters of the horse leech, for ever crying ‘Give.’ From the day they left their convents to peep shyly from a mother’s wing at the glory and splendour of the world, they saw only a people bent on pleasure and amusement, wearing fine clothes, living in fine houses, eating fine dinners, spending fortunes on carriages, hot-house flowers, wax candles, all the elegancies and daintinesses of life, getting their money in many instances mysteriously, as if it were manna dropped from heaven, and, again as if it were manna, never being able

to save any against an evil day. What girl of Amélie Jarzé's age could live in the Champs Élysées and see the everlasting procession of elegant carriages rolling by to the Bois in the sunlight of an April afternoon—great ladies, *cocodettes*, actresses, *cocottes*—and not long passionately to be as fine and as beautiful to the eye as these? Vain to remind her that her father was a Government official, highly placed, and earning a salary of fifteen thousand francs; that her mother's *dot* was in all forty thousand francs, and that half of that small capital had been devoured by the expenses of education while the two girls were at school, and the furnishing of this elegant second floor in this brand new house when the girls left school. The recapitulation of hard facts cannot stop a girl's longing for pleasure, for fine clothes, for a carriage, to be as well off as her neighbours.

The actress on the *entre-sol* was one of the sharpest thorns in Amélie's side. She was always observant of her goings out and comings in, her new clothes, her visitors, her Sunday dinner parties. Not on one particular evening in the week came Mademoiselle Arnould's friends. She had her little *levée* every afternoon — officers, *petits crevés*, financiers, artists,

journalists, flocked to the shrine. Mademoiselle Arnould had introduced *le five o'clock* for these afternoon receptions: cakes, *sorbets*, hot-house grapes, brandy and soda, *absinthe*, Vermouth, *pralines*, *marrons glacés*, crystallised rose leaves, *par dessus la tête*, and a revolving silver stand, with a *bouillotte*, half a dozen tiny egg-shell cups and saucers, and a little china pot filled with weakest tea. That was Mademoiselle's idea of *le five o'clock*. Her admirers thronged to this collation. '*Comme c'est gentil, le five o'clock*,' exclaimed a Saul among the little *crevés*, a six-foot captain of the *cent gardes*, resplendant, dazzling in his uniform, crunching sugared rose petals, adoring *cette belle Arnould*, who was a few years older than his mother.

The windows of the low ceiled *salons* were obliged to be opened for air. The voices and the laughter came up to another open window on the second floor, at which Amélie stood listening, and watching Mademoiselle's admirers come and go, counting the neat little *coupés* crawling up and down the road. Why was not she an actress, able to command diamonds, new gowns, hot-house flowers by the van-load, dinners from the *traiteur à la mode*—and, best of all, the worship of a court like that which was being

held below? Or if not an actress, why could she not marry a rich man who could give her all these things, *pleines les mains*?

One such man, able to give her all that made life worth having—life as exemplified in this wonderful city of Paris in the year sixty-seven, and to her mind the only life livable—one such man, and only one, had Heaven sent across her pathway. Millionaires might abound in this golden age of French history, which was fast drifting towards the age of blood and iron, did Amélie but know it; but millionaires as a rule declined to come to Madame Jarzé's Thursdays.

Ishmael was more good-natured. Monsieur Jarzé had been fortunate enough to do him a small service a year ago in hurrying a patent through the patent office; and Ishmael went to Madame Jarzé's tea-parties out of sheer gratitude, while on the *jour de l'an* a superb *jardinière* of yellow tulips and creamy hyacinths—a *boule jardinière*, and a thing of value, *bien entendu*, was sent to Madame Jarzé *de la part de son serviteur* Ishmael. These were small things; but what will not hope build upon? Amélie told herself that she was pretty, in the very newest style of prettiness, which might be

considered hideous five years hence; that she was fascinating, also in the new style: and what could Ishmael want more in a wife? supposing always that he wanted a wife. Even if the inclination for matrimony did not at present exist, it might surely be evolved by the charms of friendly intercourse with a girl who had a great deal in her. That was the reputation which Amélie had won for herself among her intimates. People spoke of her as a nice lively girl, with a great deal in her. And such a girl everybody agreed was bound to go far, in some direction or other.

As a cat watches a mouse had Amélie watched the conduct and manner of Ishmael to other women. Until that fatal Thursday when he was introduced to Lady Constance Danetree, he had appeared cold as ice. Even the keen eye of jealousy could discover no evil. He had talked to pretty women, to amusing women, to clever women, and there had been no shade in his manner to mark that his fancy was caught or his heart touched by any of them. But the night he met Constance Danetree he had an absorbed air which was new, and Amélie's bosom was from that hour the abode of the green-eyed one. The afternoon at the exhibition was a time of torture, for

Ishmael openly devoted himself to Lady Constance, and as openly evaded Amélie's somewhat exacting society. Amélie's feelings as she sat with her mother and sister in a box at one of the minor theatres of Paris that evening of the first of April, had an intensity which almost touched the sublime. The grief was a petty grief perhaps, the anguish of a sordid soul, the disappointment of a fortune-hunter baulked of her prey; and yet there was an element of real passion, of unmercenary feeling in the girl's despair. Heartless a year ago and proud of her heartlessness, she had discovered all at once that she had a heart. Ishmael's fine qualities of mind and person had won her fancy unawares. She had fallen in love with her victim. She had begun the pursuit stimulated only by the most vulgar passions, the ardent desire to be rich, to have a fine house, and a place of mark in this dazzling world of Imperial France. To queen it over her rivals of the *Sacré Cœur*, most of whom were the daughters of much wealthier parents than her own, many of whom had already made brilliant marriages, alliances prepared in advance by family influence, warm nests ready for them to nestle in before the pollutions of the outer world had tarnished

the purity of their young wings. From these companions of the past, old comrades and classmates, Amélie had drunk the cup of humiliation, even while profiting greatly by their friendship for her. These young matrons had sent her cards for parties which put to shame poor Madame Jarzé's Thursday evenings. They came to the Champs Élysées in delicious little *coupés*, in victorias of the very newest elegance. They wore gowns from Spricht, the *faiseur à la mode*, hardly understood the possibility of anybody else making a gown that one could wear—just as they wondered that anybody could endure existence on a second floor in a huge barrack occupied by all the world, as it were ; while they found life only tolerable in a low Italian villa, guarded by eight-foot walls and hidden in groves of acacia and lilac, within sound of the carriages rolling past the Barrière de l'Étoile. They had country houses ; they went to Arcachon, or Biarritz, or Vichy, or Pau, directly the Paris season was over ; and they patronised Amélie in a way that made her blood boil, and for which her only recompense was the ability to boast of these stylish friends to acquaintance of meaner rank.

To-night she owed the pleasure of hearing the last successful opera bouffe to her old

schoolfellow, Madame de Charleroy, who had a box twice a week, and generally gave it away from sheer capriciousness. But for a heart wrung with the sense of disappointment and failure, there is sorry comfort in Offenbach's liveliest strains.

'What rubbishing music it is! and how can people care to stare night after night at a fat woman who wears diamonds instead of clothes!' exclaimed Amélie impatiently. She had been exploring the house with her opera glass with the faint hope of seeing Ishmael among the audience.

'You ought not to bring us to see such a performance, mamma; it does us harm to be seen here.'

'I wonder what you would have said if I had left you at home?' retorted the mother, braced tightly in her violet silk gown, a *rossignol* from the last sale of *coupons* at the Louvre, made up by a cheap dressmaker and trimmed with old point that had belonged to Monsieur Jarzé's mother, and which had been mended so often that the original work of eighteenth century Flemish nuns was almost lost in the network of reparation. 'People take their daughters almost everywhere nowadays, and if you were not seen at fashionable theatres, you would run the

risk of not being seen at all by some of the richest men in Paris.’

Amélie shrugged her shoulders, and turned her face to the stage with an impatient sigh. The one rich man whom she wanted to win was not in the house to-night, and without him the world was a blank.

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END OF VOL. II.

